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IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES?

MONEY 8
IMPCL ACHIEVES HIGHEST-EVER TURNOVER OF OVER RS 160 CRORE

SPORTS 12
SRH KEEP RCB DOWN TO 149/8

HYDERABAD, THURSDAY APRIL 15, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



'WE'RE ENTERTAINERS, NOT FACT-CHECKERS'
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TIKTOK FOUNDER AMONG WORLD'S RICHEST WITH \$60 BILLION FORTUNE

Just last year, the world's most valuable startup, ByteDance Ltd., was being squeezed from all sides. The Trump administration wanted the Chinese firm, which owns the ubiquitous TikTok video-sharing platform, to get rid of assets. Beijing was cracking down on tech businesses, and India blacklisted some of its social-media apps. For all the obstacles, ByteDance kept growing. Now its founder, 38-year-old Zhang Yiming, is among the world's richest people -- a distinction that lately has carried increased risks in China. Shares of the company traded in the private market at a valuation of more than \$250 billion, people familiar with the dealings have said.



POLL PANEL FORMER CHIEF GVG KRISHNAMURTY PASSES AWAY

Former election commissioner GVG Krishnamurty died here on Wednesday due to age-related ailments. According to details shared by his family with the EC, the 86-year-old Krishnamurty passed away around 10 am. An Indian Legal Service officer, Krishnamurty became the election commissioner in October, 1993. His last rites will take place this evening at the Lodhi Road crematorium. Interestingly, the former poll panel chief had retired in the middle of the 13th Lok Sabha elections and when asked about it, he famously said: "Individuals do not matter, institutions do. And the Election Commission has grown into a strong, viable institution."



CBSE CLASS 12 EXAMS POSTPONED, CLASS 10 EXAMS CANCELLED

Class 10 board exams have been cancelled and Class 12 exams have been deferred because of a nationwide Covid surge that had led to demands by parents, students, politicians and various states for a government rethink. The big announcement affecting over 35 lakh students followed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting this afternoon with the Education Minister and top officers. The CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) exams for Class 12, which were to be held from May 4 to June 14, have been postponed, said Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in tweets.



EGYPT 'SEIZES' MEGASHIP, SEEKS NEARLY \$1 BILLION COMPENSATION

The megaship which blocked Egypt's Suez Canal and crippled world trade for nearly a week has been "seized" on court orders until the vessel's owners pay \$900 million, canal authorities said Tuesday. The 200,000-tonne MV Ever Given got diagonally stuck in the narrow but crucial global trade artery in a sandstorm on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort by Egyptian personnel and international salvage specialists to dislodge it. The blockage by the vessel held up an estimated \$9.6 billion-worth of cargo between Asia and Europe each day it was stuck.



India's National Education Policy is futuristic: Modi

2

Covid situation may worsen

Wear masks even if you are at home!: Telangana DPH

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Amidst nationwide spike in Covid-19 cases on the crest of the pandemic's second and subsequent waves, with share markets reacting wildly to the talk of imminent lockdown and inevitable curfews in many states, Telangana State's Director of Public Health on Wednesday issued an ominous warning that the situation in the state could get worse.

"If one in the family is infected, most certainly the entire family will be infected in a matter of few hours to days, he told the media.

"In the last 3-4 weeks the situation has been bad. For the next 6 weeks, it will be bad. If we don't take precautions we will be another Maharashtra. People are already finding it difficult to get beds. It will be worse. So, please take care.



According to the Director of Public Health, if the cases do not decline, there are chances of a shortage of beds. People should voluntarily take preventive action to stop it. He remarked: "Wear masks even if you are at home!"

Thus virus is spreading faster than before," he observed.

Suggesting that people should not be complacent, he said: "We are not imposing lockdown or restrictions because they are bad for state's economy. 'No lockdown' does not mean the situation is not serious and bad. The situation is deteriorating... Cases are increasing in the state and in the 4 to 6 weeks, it'll remain like that."

According to the Director of Public Health, if the cases do not decline, there are chances of a shortage of beds. People should voluntarily take preventive action to stop it. He remarked: "Wear masks even if you are at home!"

2



Democracy sans decency is the hallmark of campaign for Tirupati by-poll

5

Vote for development, performance: KCR

'TRS gave up posts for Telangana and Congress gave up Telangana to retain posts'

ML MELLY MAITREYI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Rashtra Samithi president and Chief Minister K.Chandrasekhar Rao has called upon people to assess the visible development in TS and make their choice during the upcoming Nagarajuna Sagar bye-election.

He was addressing a massive public meeting at Halia in Nagarajuna Sagar constituency on Wednesday, wrapping up the month-long campaign for the TRS candidate Nomula Bhagath. KCR said people had been following the discussions for one month.



Access to professional education no govt largesse, says SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Access to professional education is not a governmental largesse and state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate its reach at all levels, the Supreme Court has said.

This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background imposes formidable obstacles on their path to access quality education, the apex court said.

2

India, big vaccine exporter, now seeks imports as Covid cases soar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday said it will fast-track emergency approvals for COVID-19 vaccines authorised by Western countries and Japan, paving the way for possible imports of Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna shots.

The move, which will exempt companies from carrying out local safety trials for their vaccines, follows the world's biggest surge in cases in the country this month.

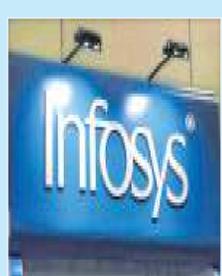


Since April 2, India has reported the highest daily tallies of infections. It reported 161,736 cases on Tuesday, taking the total to 13.7 million, while deaths rose by 879 to

171,058. On Tuesday, India's richest state Maharashtra, which accounts for about a quarter of the country's cases, said it would impose stringent restrictions from Wednesday to try to contain the spread.

India has the biggest global vaccine manufacturing capacity and had exported tens of millions of doses before its own demand skyrocketed and led to a shortage in some states.

2



Infosys board approves up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan

8

'Recruitment logs 2% drop in March, Hyd beats slowdown'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The recruitment activity saw a drop of 2 per cent in March 2021 over the previous month, mainly dragged by a decline in job postings in sectors including banking/financial services, insurance, production and manufacturing, according to a report.

The overall data indicate that there was a slight decline in job posting activity in March, according to Monster Employment Index, a job analysis report by Monster.com, a Quess Company.

Industries such as banking/financial services, insurance (6 per cent), production and manufacturing (6 per cent), telecom/ISP (4 per cent), and media and entertainment (4 per cent), which previously showed a positive outlook, have witnessed a month-on-month decline in March 2021, owing to the pandemic, the report noted.

"While the overall index witnessed a slight drop-in recruitment activity, major cities such as Bengaluru and Hyderabad show a positive outlook in hiring demand compared to last year. With companies re-adapting to the flexible-hybrid work model,

Work on 125-foot Ambedkar statue to begin soon

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Work relating to the proposed 125-foot statue of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar in the heart of the city will begin soon as the Telangana government is committed to his ideals, said TRS working president and IT, Industry and Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao here on Wednesday. KTR as well as Social Welfare Minister Koppula Eshwar,



IT Minister KT Rama Rao paying tributes to Dr. BR Ambedkar on his Jayanthi at Tank Bund in Hyderabad.

2

Has TDP gone bankrupt or is Naidu now 'powerless'?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As the momentum builds for the Tirupati by-poll, the goings-on in the TDP are leaving even seasoned political analysts flummoxed.

The party appears to be a divided house, with questions being raised about its finances, its leadership and the fate of the party cadre.

Has the TDP gone bankrupt? This is the question uppermost in the minds of many, while there are some who wonder who is at the helms of affairs of the party -- N Chandrababu Naidu, Nara Lokesh or some other family member? Party seniors are understandably

uncomfortable with the questions; they point out that the TDP had been known to even finance polls in Karnataka and West Bengal.

They point out that Naidu used to send money to the contestants -- more than what was asked for -- even when the party was in the opposition, baffling leaders like Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

However, the questions keep on being asked -- a video clip of TDP AP president K Atchannaidu alleging that the situation would not have come to this pass had Naidu paid attention to party affairs, has not helped matters.

Cong digital TV to be launched on April 24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Marking the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar, the Congress on Wednesday released the vision document for its digital media platform 'Inc TV' that will formally be launched on April 24 to help spread its message directly to people.

Addressing a joint press conference, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and party chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the platform will be formally launched on 'Panchayati Raj Day' and will help raise the voice of the down-trodden and oppressed sections of the society.

Surjewala said the digital platform will air eight hours of live programming from April 24, but will not be on the Satellite or OTT.

2

Bars & restaurants for sale, courtesy Covid -19

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

Covid-19 and the consequent lockdowns, curfews and curbs have devastated many businesses, particularly in the hospitality industry. It is widely believed that the liquor business has not been affected much, considering the door-delivery options in some states and the pervasive view that home-bound consumers were drowning their sorrows, caused by the impact of Covid-19 or otherwise, by downing more pegs than usual. Besides, political parties are known to rely heavily on

liquor contractors to bankroll their poll expenditure.

Alas! The situation is far from it now. Covid -19 has severely affected liquor business, particularly bar and restaurants are up for sale, though no one is coming forward to buy them for obvious reasons. In Hyderabad alone, at least 12 bar and restaurants were sold recently, while at least 10 bar and restaurants have been shut down due to poor business. This being the scenario in the state capital, one can imagine the position of bar and restaurants in the districts.

There are 5,631 bar and restau-



rants in the state. In Hyderabad (GHMC area), there are 2,200 bar and restaurants. Due to the lockdown in the previous year and in

view of restrictions placed subsequently by the government to contain the spread of the Coronavirus, the business of bar and restaurants was

badly affected. Telangana Bar and Restaurants association president Saganti Manohar Goud said that owners of bar and restaurant owners had suffered huge losses due to the pandemic, which adversely affected their business. Speaking to The Pioneer, he conceded that several bar and restaurants had been shut, while others had been sold.

Due to Corona, people had stopped coming to bar and restaurants. They were buying liquor from wine shops and consuming it at home or with their friends elsewhere.

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Chaitra & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam:
Tithi: Tithiya: 03:26 pm
Nakshatram: Krittika: 08:32 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 01:49 pm - 03:22 pm
Yamagandam: 06:03 am - 07:36 am
Varjyam: 06:57 am - 08:46 am
Gulika: 09:09 am - 10:43 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 05:49 pm - 07:38 pm
Ahijit Muhurtham: 11:51 am - 12:41 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 34/
Humidity: 57%
Sunrise: 06:01 am
Sunset: 06:31 pm
Current Weather Conditions Updated April 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Democracy sans decency is the hallmark of campaign for Tirupati by-poll

Democracy without decency! That's the trend of electioneering by the principal political players in the electoral battlefield of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency.

There is no place for religion, caste in democracy and politics as stated by the statute of this country. But every principal norm of electoral practice of democracy is simply and voluntarily being violated by the main contenders in the by-polls at Tirupati.

Dividing people on the lines of religion, caste is prominently seen in the electioneering process.

BJP's in-charge of Andhra Pradesh affairs Sunil Deodhar lambasted the ruling YSRCP candidate Dr Gurumurthy for not having darshan of Lord Venkateswara, despite being a Dalit. Another MLA of the ruling party in this same parliamentary constituency preferred to bear the Holy Cross on Good Friday, rather than claiming himself as a Hindu. BJP in-charge raked up this issue in the backdrop of fierce



attacks made by several Hindu organizations, including self-styled 'protectors' of Hindutva ideology, against Dalits on various forums and social media.

Caste factor is one factor that rules the fate of elections at Tirupati. It assumed significance with the film actor and Jana Sena Party Chief Pawan Kalyan's role in by-polls here.

Initially he wanted that his party should be in the fray with support of his friendly party BJP. But BJP's thoughts go in a different way. It picked up a retired IAS officer of Karnataka cadre and former chief secretary of Karnataka government K. Ratna Prabha and fielded her as its nominee with the support of Pawan.

Interestingly the same Ratna Prabha too faced court cases following Jagan's alleged involvement in several cases, during deputation period in YSR's regime in undivided AP.

Now she is pitted against Jagan's candidate. Tirupati is a peculiar constituency that has some predominance of

There is no place for religion, caste in democracy and politics as stated by the statute of this country. But every principal norm of electoral practice of democracy is simply and voluntarily being violated in the Tirupati by-poll. Dividing people is prominently seen in the electioneering process.



M D RATNA KUMAR Senior Journalist

Balija community. Because of this reason only Pawan (who belongs to Kapu community) whole-heartedly wanted this seat by claiming that it would be easier for his party to win.

But with more reasons, BJP took the opportunity to contest by strategically fielding candidate from SC Madiga community with a hope to garner more votes than its competitors like TDP and YSR Congress party whose candidates are from SC Mala community.

The AP government's acts on some issues may come in handy for the opponents of ruling YSRCP. BJP's alliance partner Pawan Kalyan's new

film 'Vakeel Saab' got raw deal at the hands of the state government. The intention of YS Jaganmohan Reddy government may be good and understandable to curb the exploitation in the name of screening benefit shows with exorbitant rates.

"Whose benefit these shows are being conducted for?" was the question from AP Information Minister Perni Nani that made sense.

This practice has been followed since many years with the permission of successive governments. But this time Jagan's government whipped the ban on benefit shows that considerably, adversely influ-

enced gross collections of the movie.

Since the hero of that film Pawan Kalyan happens to be the political bete noire of chief minister Jaganmohan Reddy, this issue flared up and flames of discontent were fanned in some sections. This development may influence Balija community that has soft corner for Pawan.

Stones allegedly pelted at Chandrababu Naidu's election meeting in Tirupati LS seat may also have some impact. TDP planned to bring

this incident to the notice of Central Election Commission and AP Governor by painting it in a political colour. Who is in need of pelting stones at Naidu? Ruling YSRCP asks. It claimed that it took place because of melee among TDP workers and it was a creation of TDP. This incident raised several eyebrows in the last leg of campaigning in Tirupati by-polls.

The BJP-Jana Sena combine would have got more mileage had Pawan Kalyan participated in the election campaign as decided earlier. The actor had to confine himself in home isolation due to Covid scare as his personal staff tested positive.

Who will have the last laugh at Tirupati, is the million-dollar question as three main contenders YSRCP, TDP and BJP-Jana Sena combine are relying on their carefully knitted poll strategies. They have already readied their arguments for their possible victory. If YSRCP wins the seat, it would be the acceptance of people of its 22 months of ruling and nothing but a go-

ahead sign for its agenda. What particular purpose will be served additionally on the part of YSRCP by winning one more seat? Had it succeeded in getting SCS with 22 MPs? These questions are causing irritation to the ruling party naturally as it on the same question earlier thought that resignations of all 25MPs would be a powerful weapon to achieve SCS.

If TDP manages to get the people's mandate, then it may be viewed as a slap on the face of YSRCP government and its policies implemented hitherto.

It would give a new lease of life to TDP that had to boycott recent elections held for zilla and mandal parishads due to lack of competitive spirit following ruling party's winning spree in ULB and RLB polls! In the event of BJP winning the seat, it would enable the party to draw a road map for expansion in AP.

It had got four Lok Sabha seats of Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram, Secunderabad and Karimnagar on its own in the

1998 mid-term polls in undivided state of AP that rejuvenated the party in the state. In subsequent elections of 1999, BJP won seven LS seats, including Tirupati with alliance with TDP.

The Congress may not be the main contender here as it has been decimated in 2014 elections itself following AP's bifurcation. It has found a neat burial for itself due to that infamous decision.

Actually Congress candidate Dr.Chinta Mohan is considered to be the most eligible person to seek vote from Tirupati electorate with whose support he enjoyed victories on six occasions earlier besides becoming Union minister three decades ago in PV Narasimha Rao's government! Such glory has become past for Congress now and there may be no signs of rejuvenation for it even in days to come. It's simply an uphill task for Congress to get entry into both central and state's legislature on its own.

Dr Reddy's working on stability data on 2 to 8 C temp range for Sputnik V

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Reddy's Laboratories is in the process of generating additional stability data for Russia's COVID-19 vaccine Sputnik V, which has a storage condition of -18C, on 2 to 8 C, a senior official of the drug maker said on Wednesday.

Deepak Sapra, Dr Reddy's Chief Executive Officer, API and Services said in a press conference that the vaccine will be imported in a frozen condition from Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) with which it has an agreement to distribute 125 million human doses (250 million vials) in India, maintaining -18 to -22. The doses will be kept outside for 15-20 minutes before being administered to the people. "In addition to the product which is at -18C, today we are in the process of generating additional stability data on the 2 to 8C temperature range. This data will be available in a few months, after which we will make the necessary amendment request to the regulator and request for the storage condition to be modified to 2 to 8C," Sapra told reporters.

Nellikal and other LI schemes to be completed in time: KCR

■ Promises new ration cards, pensions ■ Praja Darbar to solve Podu lands issue

ML MELLY MAITREY ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy has said that he will be back in 15 days to chart out a development plan for Nagarjuna Sagar constituency and execute it.

KCR addressed the public meeting at Halia in Nagarjuna Sagar constituency on Wednesday a day before the close of the campaign for the bye election scheduled for April 17.

He said that not only Nellikal lift irrigation scheme, but other LI schemes sanctioned to Devarakonda, Mlyalaguda, Huzurnagar and Kodada constituencies would be completed in time to bring Godavari water to ayacut in Nagarjuna Sagar constituency. "If they are not completed, I will not ask for your votes," he said.

He also announced that pensions to those who completed 57 years, new pensions and ration cards to eligible beneficiaries would be sanctioned soon. Predicting the win of NomulaBhagath as



Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy addressing a public meeting at Halia in Nagarjuna Sagar constituency on Wednesday.

MLA and that another TRS leader Koti Reddy will be made MLC, KCR said the long pending Podu lands issue was also the handiwork of Congress. He said he would hold a 'prajadarbar' and visit the constituency with state machinery and would stay there for two days if required and resolve the issue.

Earlier, Minister Jagadish Reddy who presided over the meeting said some parties did

not want the Chief Minister to campaign as they were scared that their lies would get exposed.

Praising the administration of KCR, Jagadish Reddy said in just six years, he showed an excellent development model to the country and Nalgonda district was rid of fluoride problem through Mission Bhagiratha drinking water scheme to households. A leader who was MLA for 35

Teachers, parents urge govt to promote Class X students

ANUSHA PUPPALA ■ HYDERABAD

Welcoming the decision of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for cancelling the Class X board exams and postponing the Class XII exams in view of surge in Covid cases across the country, parents and government teachers associations in Telangana demanded the government to take similar steps and promote the students to higher classes due to online classes and insufficient working days.

According to the parents associations and government teachers association, students are stressed out as only online classes were conducted since last year and parents are worried due to surge in Covid cases across the country due to which parents are reluctant to send their kids to schools to write offline exams.

Nagati Narayana, President of TPA said, "Telangana Parents Association welcomes the CBSE's wise decision to postpone the Class XII exam and cancel Class X exam. The decision to design objective criteria to declare the result of Class 10 students along with giving opportunity to write exam any student, who was unsatisfied with the marks is appreciated. Anyhow it's an appropriate decision at the time of ongoing uncertain situation due to spike in Covid cases. Usually state board always follows what CBSE has decided so even state board should promote students on lines of CBSE board. If students and parents are not satisfied with the marks given by the board they can write the exam later."

Venkat Kadapa Sainath, Joint Secretary of Hyderabad School Parents Association (HSPA) said, "HSPA welcomes the decision of CBSE board the cases are increasing rampantly and even students are tensed as all the classes were conducted online, we request the state government to take similar steps to ensure that the students who are worried shall have some relief and relaxation."

Office leasing in 7 cities falls 48 pc in Jan-Mar: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Net leasing of office space fell 48 per cent during January-March across seven cities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but demand for the flexible space from corporates has increased, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

In its latest quarterly report, property consultant Cushman & Wakefield said the net leasing of office space declined to 35,78,585 sq ft in January-March 2021 from 69,31,922 sq ft in the corresponding period of the previous year across seven major cities. The flexible space leased by corporate clients increased to 15,523 seats during the first quarter of this calendar year from 10,690 seats in the year-ago period.

"A sharp jump indicates that occupiers are relying on managed space as a smart alternative in the current situation," it said.

Work on 125-foot Ambedkar...

Continued from page 1

Excise and Tourism Minister V Srinivas Goud, among others, paid floral tributes to the statue of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar at the Tank Bund. Speaking on the occasion, KTR mentioned that an agreement on the construction of Ambedkar's statue was reached on Wednesday in the presence of Social Welfare Minister Koppula Eshwar.

Dr. Ambedkar's services and struggle to bring the downtrodden sections into mainstream society were unparalleled. He envisaged equal rights for all and it was

his philosophy to educate, organize, and agitate to reach the cherished goal. TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy adopted the same principles to achieve Telangana State and Telangana was achieved Constitutionally, KTR said.

In line with the vision and ideals of Dr. Ambedkar, the Government of Telangana had embraced a welfare-oriented agenda for the uplift of weaker sections. The state government had given priority for the setting up about 1,000 Residential Schools for weaker sections.

Vote for development, performance: KCR

Continued from page 1

"You may have come to a conclusion by now on whom to elect. Don't get swayed or confused. If people elect those who have done good work, better things will be in store for them," he remarked.

were campaigning in five States, but strangely some did not want the Chief Minister to campaign here, he said.

"Why some people did not want KCR to come here and did not want this meeting, think about it," he said.

India, big vaccine exporter...

Continued from page 1

Dozens of poor countries have relied on Indian exports to run their inoculation drives.

The health ministry said vaccines authorised by the World Health Organization or authorities in the United States, Europe, Britain and Japan could be granted emergency use approval in India. "If any of these regulators have approved a vaccine, the vaccine is now

'Recruitment logs...

Continued from page 1

And digital hiring on the rise with innovative tech, we anticipate a recovery of the Indian job market in the coming quarters," Monster.com CEO Sekhar Garisa said. The Monster Employment Index is a broad and comprehensive analysis of online job posting activity on the Monster platform and real-time review of online career outlets during March 2021.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES	
GOLD	₹ 47,780 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 320
SILVER	₹ 71,900 (1kg)
SILVER	₹ 200
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹193
Without Skin	₹219
Broiler at Farm	₹133
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	441
VIJAYAWADA	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.41

Bars & restaurants for sale, courtesy...

Continued from page 1

Besides, the permit rooms at wine shops were also affecting the business of bar and restaurants. The annual licence fee for a bar and restaurant in the city is Rs 40 lakh. The government did not give any concessions to the bar and restaurants, despite their pleas in the wake of losses triggered by the pandemic. They say they are unable to pay the licence fee to the government. They have to pay salaries to the staff and rents for their building, regardless of their earnings.

The owner of one bar and restaurant located near the Tank Bund had decided to sell his bar and restaurant for Rs 1 crore two months ago. No one came forward to buy it at that price.

Access to professional education no govt largesse, says SC

Continued from page 1

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah made these observations in a verdict on separate pleas filed by two students from Ladakh who were not admitted to MBBS degree course in medical colleges here despite due nomination by the Union Territory and in terms of the seats notified by the Centre.

Covid situation may worsen

Continued from page 1

3,07,499. A total of 1,780 people have succumbed to the lethal virus in Telangana.

As per the state government data, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) accounted for 361 cases --- the most number of the reported cases, followed by Medchal Malkajgiri (245), Ranga Reddy (206) and Nizamabad (187).

Telangana's recovery rate stands at 91.86 per cent and the case fatality rate is at 0.53 per cent. As many as 72,364

samples were tested on Tuesday, with 16,892 patients under home/institutional isolation.

India hits highest daily tally once again

The scenario across the nation is worse. With 1,84,372 new COVID-19 cases being recorded in the last 24 hours, India's tally has reached 1,38,73,825, hitting the highest daily tally once again, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Wednesday. Wednesday's caseload marked the fourth straight day of the country seeing over 1.5 lakh new cases.

The new cases pushed the total cases to over 1.38 crore. Deaths rose by 1,027 to 1,72,085. Over 1,000 people died in 24 hours ending Wednesday evening, making it the highest daily death count in nearly six months. At present, there are 13,65,704 active cases, while the overall recoveries have reached 1,23,36,036.

Initially, the language used will only be Hindi and English, but may be expanded in regional languages too.

He clarified that the same would be headed by a journalist and would help put forth the views of all sections of the society that are currently not being shown.

Kharge said the Constitution of India is good but Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to spread his own ideology.

Cong digital TV...

Continued from page 1

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Cab services face fresh challenges

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The second wave of the pandemic has been dealing a severe blow to the several means of public transport that have been on the path of recovery from the impact of the pandemic last year. The impact on the cab services, maxi cabs, mini-buses and three-wheelers is already visible.

The virulent form of the second wave, which is spreading rather on the sly, led to the remarkable decrease in the Uber and Ola cab services if the dwindling number of these cabs from 80,000 to 50,000 during the past one month is any indication.

With diminishing patronage by people, not able to generate much revenue in spite of working hard day and night, many drivers and car owners have been relinquishing their profession. Cab drivers and Taxi Drivers' Joint Action Committee Chairman Shaik Salaudhin expressed concern over the steep fall in use of cab services during the past 10 days. He said, "Prior to Covid-19, thousands derived their livelihood with the help of cab services, but now the very cab service became burdensome to



them. The demand for 8-seater, 10-seater maxi cabs, 14-seater and 22-seater mini buses has come down. Earlier, people used to hire these services for marriages, other celebrations and mass celebration events and so on."

Till May, there are no auspicious times to celebrate weddings. Hence the demand for vehicles has come down. The

tourism sector has been severely affected by the pandemic. As a result, number of people arriving here for tourism purposes has also come down. Prior to the pandemic, on an average 50,000 tourists used to arrive here. In spite of the curbs on global travel continuing, the arrival of tourists to the city had been picking up slowly, but the second phase of

the covid-19 proved to be a bane on tourism. This has affected the booking of various modes of road transport. The tour operators have been worried over the adverse impact.

Since the last one year, on account of working from home given to the IT experts by IT units, the IT professionals have been working from homes. Daily over 10,000 cabs plied to

Prior to Covid-19, thousands derived their livelihood with the help of cab services, but now the very cab service became burdensome to them. The demand for 8-seater, 10-seater maxi cabs, 14-seater and 22-seater mini buses has come down. Earlier, people used to hire these services for marriages, other celebrations and mass celebration events and so on.

SHAIK SALAUDDIN
Taxi Drivers' JAC Chairman

hi-tech city from various parts of the city. Now, the situation has reversed. Many cab services are dependent on commuting public utilising their services. Because of the current emergency situation, many city dwellers have been using cab services only in emergency situations.

Moreover, the use of individual transport has increased for over one year because of the pandemic. Since November last year, till March second week there had been demand for public transport. However, the demand has gone down currently.

Residents continue to throw plastic waste, garbage in flood-flow canals

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The flood-flow canals, built to carry flood waters, are getting clogged as people are in the habit of disposing of plastic waste, bed sheets, pillows, glass articles and others in the canals.

Last year, it may be recalled that the canals and drains overflowed to inundate the low-lying areas because of heavy rains.

To prevent recurrence of such incidents in future, the state government launched Strategic Nala Development Scheme to modernise the inter-linked tanks, expand the nalas, strengthen the flood-flow canals. The government recently released Rs 858 crore for the purpose.

As a precautionary measure, the authorities took steps to remove clogs in flood-flow canals at 356 spots at a cost of Rs 45.28 crore.

The last year's floods have affected over 40,000 families in the city. Therefore, the authorities have been taking steps to remove the clogs in nalas so that the canals will empty the flood waters into Musi River.



In spite of the government procuring garbage from door-to-door, some have been dumping mats, blankets, coconuts, empty glucose tins, ladles, spoons, chutney cups, chicken and mutton bones, empty plastic covers, condom packets and other goods in canals. Of all the goods found in the canals, plastic goods constitute 20 per cent.

The local businessmen are no exception. The clogged flood-flow canals have been overflowing emitting a reeking smell. The culprits include hotels, lodges, messes, tiffin centres, function halls, cinema halls, hospitals, industries, dairy farms and other commercial organisations.

The GHMC has appointed

a chief engineer to each GHMC zone to supervise the nala clearing works, which are under way on a war-footing in the city. In fact, nalas network extended over an area of 951 km in the city. The authorities have taken up works to complete the nalas and drains clearing works before the onset of monsoons.

The GHMC has been implementing nala action plan for 2020-21 at a cost of Rs 24.54 crore. As per the plan, 170 teams would be deployed from June 1 to October 31 at 92 locations. In each location, two labourers would be deployed for the purpose. In all, 202 pump sets will be deployed in various GHMC circles.

CITY LIGHTS

Rachakonda, Cyberabad cops pay rich tributes to Ambedkar

Baba Saheb Ambedkar's life continues to inspire people, Rachakonda

Police Commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat said here on

Wednesday. Speaking at an

event marking the 130th birth

anniversary of BR Ambedkar,

the architect of the Indian

constitution, Bhagwat said

Ambedkar should not be

viewed just as a leader of scheduled castes but one who fought his

entire life through all his means for the upliftment any person who

is downtrodden or discriminated. "Essentially, he stood for equality,

liberty and justice for all and he gave us all the same principles

through the Indian Constitution thereby setting an example to many

countries of the world," he said. Cyberabad police commissioner

VC Sajjanar too paid tributes to Dr Ambedkar at an event organised

at the Cyberabad Police Commissionerate.



37 kilometres in 29 minutes with live organ in ambulance

The Hyderabad Traffic

Police once again

facilitated the transport of

the live organs (Lungs) by

providing non-stop

movement to the ambulance

carrying the organ from Rajiv

Gandhi International Airport

to KIMS Hospital in

Begumpet on Wednesday

afternoon. The distance

between RGIA to KIMS Hospital in Begumpet is 36.8 kilometres,

which was covered in 29 minutes. The medical team carrying live

organ left at 2:19 pm from RGIA and reached KIMS Hospital at

2:48 pm. The efforts of Hyderabad and Cyberabad Traffic Police in

the transportation of live organ were applauded by the

management of KIMS Hospital, Begumpet as it would help in

saving precious lives. This year in 2021, Hyderabad Traffic Police

has facilitated organ transport 12 times.



National Fire Service Day observed at fire stations

The National Fire

Service Day was

observed at various

fire stations across the

city here on

Wednesday. Every year,

on April 14, the

National Fire Service

Day is observed in

remembrance of the 71

brave fire personnel who lost their lives fighting the fire that broke

out on the Freighter SS Fort Stikine at the Victoria Dock in the then

Bombay Port on April 14, 1944. The accident led to the death of

hundreds of people including Fire personnel. Officers and staff paid

tributes and remembered those fire personnel who lost their lives

fighting the fire as part of their duty.



Security guard set ablaze by employer dies in Hyderabad

A woman security guard who

was set ablaze by her

employer four days ago

suspecting of committing a

theft at Kukatpally succumbed

to burns on Tuesday night.

According to the police, R

Muniamma, 38, a native of

Nagarunool worked as a security guard at the house of one Naga

Kumari located at MIG colony, Kukatpally for last few years. Her

husband works as a construction worker and the couple have two

daughters and a son. Few days ago, a theft of gold ornaments was

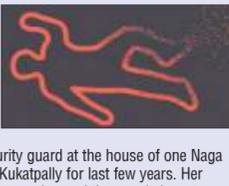
committed at Naga Kumari's house and she suspected Muniamma.

On Friday, Naga Kumari and her daughter Swathi blamed

Muniamma for the theft and asked her to return the jewellery. "An

argument ensued during which Naga Kumari and her daughter

doused Muniamma with thinner liquid and lit a match stick. The



LET LIVE

Monkeys play an important role in maintaining healthy forest ecosystems. They aid the process of seed dispersal as their diet consists majorly of fruits. When habituated feeding leads them out of their natural habitat, it also affects the health of the forests and alters their foraging patterns. By feeding monkeys, you lure them out of their natural habitat into the cities. This directly increases their chances of becoming victims of road accidents due to speeding vehicles on roads and highways. Injured monkeys are banished from their troops and most of the times they do not receive proper medical care. They end up with permanent injuries and disabilities, making survival difficult all alone.



Raped minor girl attempts suicide

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A minor girl was allegedly raped by a youngster in Jagadgirigutta, police said here on Wednesday. The victim allegedly attempted to die by suicide later.

According to the police, the 15-year-old girl, a Class Ten student, stays with her parents who are construction workers. The incident occurred when the girl was alone in the house, with the suspect Raju, who lives in the neighbourhood, allegedly raping her a few days ago.

The victim did not reveal what happened to anyone due to fear and did not raise any alarm. However, her mother found out when she was crying a few days ago. The girl attempted to die by suicide as well, police said, adding that she was rescued by her parents.

She was immediately shifted to the Gandhi Hospital where she is being treated. Based on a complaint from her mother, a case was booked and investigation is on.

Two peddlers arrested with 200 kg marijuana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Rachakonda Police Special Operations Team along with the Hayathnagar police nabbed two interstate drug peddlers here on Wednesday. Police recovered 200 kilos of marijuana, a truck and other material, all together worth Rs 40.5 lakh from them.

The arrested persons were Devendar Singh, 45, from Bharathpur Town in Rajasthan and P.Ravindra Kumar Pandith, 40, a truck driver from Hathras of Uttar Pradesh. Two suspects, Yadav and Hari, were absconding.

According to the police, Devendar, Ravindra and Yadav were close friends while Yadav was a drug peddler transporting marijuana from the Araku area of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh to Uttar Pradesh.

"During this process, about three years ago, Yadav got acquainted with Hari from Araku area, and since then he was purchasing marijuana



from him on a regular basis. Yadav was using Devendar and Ravindra for the illicit transportation of the marijuana from Araku," Rachakonda Police Commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat said. Yadav chose transport trucks plying Southern and Northern States and arranged secret cabins behind the driver's seat to hide the marijuana. "He purchased marijuana from Hari for Rs 3,000 per kg and sold it to customers for Rs 10,000 per kg," police said, adding that on April 7, they arranged a truck and loaded 40 bags, each weighing 5 kg, of marijuana from Andhra Pradesh.

"They were caught when they reached Hayathnagar.

Gated community in city turns hotspot for Corona

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

One of the biggest gated communities located in city's Madinaguda area is currently a Covid cluster, with as many as 150 cases reported since March.

The gated community 'My Home Jewel' has a total of 2,016 apartments, in which around 8,000 people reside. In 2020, the gated community was in its full precautionary mode with less than 20 cases reported.

As of Monday, there are 112 active cases in the complex, with hundreds of families in direct contact. Following this, the association has set up a help desk in society.

Nanda Kishore, general secretary of My Home Jewel owners association, as quoted by several media houses, said: "We have asked the residents, who tested positive to inform us immediately, as the emergency response team can implement the SOPs. We circulate information through



WhatsApp mentioning flat number and block of the infected patients."

The association has also taken precautionary measures by putting a poster outside the flat of infected patients to avoid the spread among the residents, delivery boys or any visitors.

The association has also provided help with an emergency response team which supplies them with basic amenities including food, medicine, and more at the doorstep of those who are infected.

"If someone has to go to the

hospital, we have an ambulance with PPE kits. We also sanitize the ambulance as well as the places where the patients have walked through" said Nanda Kishore.

However, the community association has not put up any restrictions on people going to work as there are many people who need to provide for their families, need to go to work.

"Since the government has not imposed lockdown, we have not imposed restrictions. If somebody test positive, we advise him or her to isolate" Kishore added.

Can distribution transformers pull off power usage this summer?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

With the temperatures in summer soaring high, the consumption of electricity has increased in Greater Hyderabad, raising concern over the supply channels including power supply substations, feeders and distribution transformers, if they would be able to cope up with the overload.

Indeed, the cause for heavy consumption of power is due to the increased usage of air conditioners and air coolers to relieve people from the high temperatures during the day in the city. The temperature on an average is crossing 40 degree Celsius mark one month. Consumers, who typically

used less than 150 units per month until February, were currently spending between 250-300 units. As a result, the meter is running at a breakneck speed recording double the number of the readings compared to the previous months.

However, the slab rate has also skyrocketed due to the increased current bills. Proof of this is the recent March bills. On one hand, no one can restrict the usage of air conditioners during the summer, when the temperatures are very high, while on the other hand, the consumers are finding it difficult to pay the increased bills.

The city has over 50 lakh power connections. Until last March, the daily peak hour



electricity demand did not exceed 2,500 to 2,700 MW. But recently 2,900 to 3,000 MW usage was recorded in the city. Concerns had been raised that

demand was at record levels even at night. The reason for concern was the efficiency of the power supply system in the city.

The pressure on power supply sub-stations, feeders and distribution transformers in the city is increasing. Capacity feeders are often tripping and

bursting due to overload and as a result of this city dwellers are forced to spend some time without power.

Indeed, the fact is that the load of the service transformers in the city have not been increased from time to time; many of the DTRs in the city are working under overload condition and loose lines have not been fixed.

All went hassle-free until this winter, but summer power consumption wasn't suitable for the DTRs.

The government has instructed the electricity department engineers to be available to customers during peak hours and to immediately address technical issues that might arise during the summer.

IPL online betting goes on unabated in Medak

K SIDDESHAM
MEDAK

Betting on the shortest version of the cricket - T-20 matches in the current 14th IPL - is going on unchecked at various places in the district changing hands huge amounts of money. There is none to take disciplinary action against the betting activity. The police are accused of looking the other way as the betting goes on unchecked in the district.



The bookies have been arranging for betting at various secret places in Medak, Toopran, Narsapur, Ramayampet, Chinnna Sankarampet, Manoharabad, Haveli Ghanpur, Chetunta, Veldurti, Papannapet, Kolcharam, Nizampet and other mandals to cash in on the weakness of people to become rich overnight.

The punters have been placing their bets in lakhs of rupees. The bets have been placed online. While some, who want to get rich soon, burned a hole in their pockets by placing bets. The cricket, which has become more commercial, is being regarded as that money-spinning cow for all - irrespective of their age and gender. If the punters hail from affluent sections of society, it is okay to lose money. But the betting would destroy the poor and middle class families. Bookies monitor the betting constantly. In fact,

what is needed is to have a mobile phone.

The final of the IPL match is scheduled on May 30 - after a marathon season of 43 days. During the 43 days, crores of rupees will change hands in the form of betting. The punters have been placing their bets on every ball and each ball. The profile of punters includes businessmen, professors, teachers, youth and many others.

While some earned lakhs of rupees, some others borrowed funds and lost them in betting.

The owner of a mobile phone shop is understood to have been playing a crucial role in IPL bettings. Reputed business people in the town have allegedly been running the betting activity in the district. Coming under intense pressure from these people, one person was understood to have left the district to take shelter elsewhere. Another person was reported to have discarded

ed his property in the district and running a medical shop to eke out a living. The commission being charged by bookies would be Rs 1000 for Rs 10,000 placed as bet and Rs 10,000 for every Rs 1 lakh placed on bets.

The bookies have been encouraging betting via specially created mobile application through a third party in the district. Earlier, the betting was done through WhatsApp messages and text messages. The mobile application was launched as the police have intensified their vigil on the betting. Some complainants to the police, who wished to remain anonymous, who have lost everything in betting urged the police for action, but the police are accused of adopting dilly-dallying tactics and turning them away.

At some places, the bookies have been bringing intense pressure on the punters for failure to pay money.

Schemes worth Rs 1K cr soon for downtrodden

PNS ■ MAHBUBNAGAR

The nation would witness growth only when the people living at the bottom of the society were brought out from their problems, Minister for Excise, sports, Culture and Tourism Dr V Srinivas Goud said on Wednesday.

They have to think about what they were doing to society and the nation. The minister paid rich tributes to Dr B R Ambedkar by garlanding his statue at RTC bus station in Mahbubnagar on Wednesday on the occasion of 130th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar.

Telangana state was formed because of Article 3 of the Constitution written by Dr Ambedkar. People should think how the situation of the weaker sections was improved comparing before Telangana state formation and after.

The government was going to implement welfare schemes worth Rs 1000 crore for Scheduled Castes in the state and SC students would be given a Rs 20 lakh stipend for continuing their studies abroad. Many schemes were being implemented for their welfare including Kalyana Lakshmi, Shadi Mubarak and Aasara pensions.



Vice President Venkaiah Naidu and TRS working president pays floral tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar on Wednesday.



KCR pays tributes to Ambedkar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Chandrasekhar Rao on Wednesday paid tributes to BR Ambedkar on the occasion of his 130th birth anniversary, who is revered as the architect of India's Constitution. Rao lauded the efforts put in by Babasaheb Ambedkar to make a secular, democratic and republic country. He said it was due to Ambedkar's foresight that TS was formed.

Efforts were on to build Ambedkar Bhavan in Medak

PNS ■ MEDAK

In connection with 130th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar, rich tributes were paid to the architect of Indian Constitution by MLA Padma Devender Reddy here on Wednesday along with other elected representatives. She assured the people that she would take steps to build an Ambedkar Bhavan in the town.

'Emulate ideals of Babasaheb'

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Dr BR Ambedkar had strived hard for establishing equality in the society and for the progress of oppressed classes, Collector Hanumantha Rao said on Wednesday. Addressing a meeting after garlanding the statue of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary here on Wednesday, the Collector said Dr Ambedkar had identified that education was the only weapon



to eradicate social inequalities in the society. Stating that Dr Ambedkar was a great social

reformer and a politician and maker of the Constitution, the Collector said he had worked hard for a society where there should not be caste discrimination. He called upon the younger generation to emulate Dr Ambedkar's ideals and strive for achieving his goals. ZP chairperson Manjusri, Additional collector Rajarshi Shah, Scheduled Caste development Deputy director Akhilesh Reddy and others were present.

Follow in BR Ambedkar's footsteps: Madhan Reddy

PNS ■ NARSAPUR

Follow the footsteps of Dr Ambedkar, who worked dedicatedly for the uplift of the backward classes of society and played a vital role in making India a strong nation, said Narsapur MLA Madhan Reddy.

Madhan Reddy along with Women Commission Chairperson Sunitha Laxma Reddy and others participated in the 130th birth anniversary celebrations at Narsapur Children's park organised by the Dalit communities in the town.

Madhan Reddy and Sunitha Laxma Reddy garlanded the statue and urged everyone to work hard to achieve the aspiration of Ambedkar. The MLA said that they would soon set up statues of prominent people at a dedicated space in the constituency.

Harish: CM following in footsteps of Ambedkar

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Finance Minister T Harish Rao said that Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao is following in the footsteps of the Dr BR Ambedkar by making enough allocations for backward classes in the State Budget every year. Addressing the gathering after unveiling the Statue of Dr BR Ambedkar at Dharmareddy village in Gajvel Mandal on Wednesday, Harish Rao said that they have also come up with several programmes to create self-employment opportunities to unemployed Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In memory of Ambedkar, Rao said that the Chief Minister has decided to build the tallest



Ambedkar statue at Tank Bund in Hyderabad. With an aim to give political opportunities to SC and ST women, the Minister said his government has provided reservations to SC and ST women in market committee elections in Telangana. Hailing Dr BR Ambedkar as a visionary and Messiah of the backward classes in India, Rao said Dr Ambedkar had provided the right to vote for all sections, besides framing the best political administration system in the world.

SHORT TAKES

'Make use of paddy procurement centre, don't get cheated by touts'

NARSAPUR : Local MLA Madhan Reddy and Chairperson of Mahila Commission Sunita Lakshma Reddy on Wednesday have exhorted the



farmers to make good use of the paddy procurement centres set up to lift paddy from farmers. Speaking after inaugurating the procurement centre set up under the aegis of the Primary Agricultural Cooperative society here on Wednesday, they warned the farmers against disposing of their paddy to middlemen and get cheated by the touts. The MSP for paddy is very encouraging, they said advising the farmers to bring their dried paddy to procurement centres and get remunerative price for their produce. Medak Additional collector Ramesh, RDO Ravinder Reddy, Tahsilidar Malati, PACS chairman Machanuri Raju Yadav, PACS vice-chairman Raji Reddy, municipal vice-chairman Nayeem Moddeen and others were present on the occasion.

DMHO inspects Coronavirus vaccine drive at Mulug PHC

MULUG : District Medical and Health Officer Dr Appayya on Wednesday visited the Primary Health Centre at Venkatapuram in Mulug mandal and inspected the vaccination programme underway there and also the progress of the rapid antigen tests. Later, he went through the attendance register. Speaking to MPDO and Sarpanch, the DMHO asked them to ensure that more people receive vaccine at the Thursday's vaccination programme. Later, he visited Rayinigudem village and encouraged many in the village to receive the vaccine bringing them to the vaccination centre. The vaccination programme at various PHCs in Mulug district and in villages under their limits is as follows: Rayinigudem PHC- Mulug village panchayat, Kasimdevipet and Mallampalli, Pasra PHC- Moddugudem and Project Nagar, Govindraopet PHC-Balanagar, Tadvai PHC-Katapur, Chunchupalli PHC-Rajupet, Mangapet PHC-Komatipalli, Kodisala, Kannaigudem PHC- Yeturu and Singaram, Royyuru PHC, Peruru PHC-Cherukuru, Wajedu PHC-Pragallapalli, Yedira PHC-Chirutapalli and Alubaaku. Besides these places, the vaccine would be administered at Area Hospital in Mulug, community health centre at Nuguru Venkatapuram, PHC at Yeturu Nagaram and so on.

Unseasonal rains damage crops in Nizamabad district

NIZAMABAD : The unexpected and unseasonal rains damaged several crops in the erstwhile Nizamabad district on Tuesday. The sudden rains lashed several parts of the Nizama bad district including Jakranpally, Kotagiri, Renjal, Chanduru, Bodhan, Yedapally mandals. Due to lightning strikes in various parts of the district, several coconut trees and palm trees were damaged at Chintaluru village of Jakranpally mandala and Yadgarpur of Kotagiri mandal respectively. The sudden hailstorm also damaged the standing and harvested paddy crop at Kotagiri, Nasrullabad, and other mandals.

Statue of Doddi Komaraiah to be unveiled in Janagoan

WARANGAL: Minister for Panchayatraj Errabelli Dayakar Rao has said that a statue of the first martyr of Telagnana Armed Struggle Doddi Komaraiah will be unveiled at his village of Kadivendi in Devarupalla mandal of Janagoan district on July 4. Speaking after releasing a poster of celebrations to commemorate Doddi Komaraiah in this connection at his camp office here on Wednesday, Errabelli said that the extreme sacrifice made by Komaraiah intensified the Telangana armed struggle and paved the way for getting rid of Nizam and his private army the Razakars. His sacrifice inspired other people to take up arms for their liberation, he said adding that Chief Minister would refer often to sacrifice made by Doddi Komaraiah as and even the situation demands. Errabelli says that he takes pride as Doddi Komaraiah belongs to his Palakurti Assembly constituency. The state government has been implementing many programmes deriving inspiration from Doddi Komuraiah.

Negligence main cause of major fire accidents

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

High temperatures and negligence were the primary causes for occurrences of the major fire accidents, said Collector Sharman after unveiling the wall poster for fire safety awareness week in his camp office on Wednesday.

He said fire department crews should work to create full-fledged awareness among the public by holding several programmes about fire accidents in this one week. Fire accidents in industries were caused due to improper maintenance of machinery and failure to keep the environment clean and precautions should be taken while storing gas for medical usage in hospitals also, he said.

Further, he said the fire-fighting process and the circumstances under which the fires spread were to be shown through mock drills during this week to the public for increasing their level of awareness.

Fire department officials said there was a chance of fire erupting if one smoked cigarettes in prohibited zones, during short circuits in electrical appliances, overloading, loose wiring, burning grass in fields and others.

They went on to add that fire might spread due to leakage of flammable materials, welding, cutting, soldering of metals and warned that taking precautionary measures while doing these kinds of works were absolutely necessary. They asked all to dial 101 if fire was detected in any area.

'File atrocities case against police, TRS'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC National Spokesperson Dr Sravan Dasoju demanded the DGP of Telangana to file an SC, ST Atrocities case against the police officer and TRS activists who have brutally attacked a dalit student leader, Telangana activist, TPCC General Secretary, Manavatha Roy on Wednesday on the birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar.

While condemning the brazen attack on a dalit student leader, Dr Sravan termed it as a shameful act and criticised the police officials for colluding with the TRS party in Nagarjuna Sagar who are working like slaves of KCR to support the TRS candidate to win the bi-election in an illegal and un-democratic way.

According to him, Manavatha Roy was reportedly beaten, ponderously insult-

Dalit entrepreneurship thrives on T-PRIDE

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLY

Peddapally collector Dr Sangita Satyanarayana paid tributes to the noble soul and exhorted people to walk in the footsteps of Ambedkar, who gifted Constitution to the country and a clear direction to the independent India, to put the country on the high road to development. His services to the down-trodden sections of society are laudable, he said. The state government has been spending

KTR seeks people's support to bring more development to towns, villages

ML MELLY MAITREYI
HYDERABAD

With notification for elections to Warangal and Khammam Municipal Corporations and five other municipalities expected to be issued any time now, government is speeding up its proposed development works in these civic bodies.

After initiating various development works and inaugurating some of them in Khammam and Warangal, Minister KT Rama Rao on Wednesday laid stone for many development works in undivided Mahbubnagar district.

The development works mainly related to Mission Bhagiratha, integrated markets, roads, double bedroom houses and other basic amenities to improve quality of life in urban local bodies. KTR laid stone for eight works worth Rs 15 crore in Jachcherla and inaugurated Mission Bhagiratha



Water Tank, BT road, Nalla Cheruvu mini tank bund works and inspected Two BR houses at Kaverammampeta.

Speaking at Jachcherla, KTR said that maximum number of development and welfare schemes were being implemented in the State. Telangana was the only government that came to the rescue of private school teachers. He said if a performing government was encouraged by people extending their support to the ruling

party, the government could do more development, he said.

KCR's vision is for systematic development of towns and villages and the government was giving equal emphasis to welfare and development. Whether it is Aasara pensions, quality power supply to all sectors, people themselves compare the governance now and earlier by other parties. He reiterated that new ration cards and pensions would be issued soon.

The Polepally IT SEZ expedited the development of Jachcherla, he said and appealed to people to elect TRS in all the 27 wards in Jachcherla municipality and they would get development as gift from the TRS government.

Earlier he toured in Kottur municipality and laid foundation for the municipal building and some other works. He welcomed some local Congress leaders and workers who joined the TRS in his presence.

Srisailam plant restoration works at snail's pace

Six months after the fire mishap, still no power production at units 3 and 4

MALLEPALLI GOVERDHAN
NAGARKURNOOL

Though a major fire broke out at 3 and 4 units of Srisailam power plant which was built with German technology, no efforts were still made to restore the plants even after ten months. The works were going at a snail's pace drawing flak from the people and political leaders.

It may be recalled here that a fire accident occurred on the left bank of the power plant on August 20 last year killing nine technical experts and causing a huge financial loss. Ironically, the families of the deceased were still waiting for assistance from the government.

The officials should have installed new generations in the



place of the old ones which were completely gutted in the fire by this time. But, owing to the apathy of the officials concerned, 3 and 4 units of the power plant were still not brought into production. The panel board was destroyed in the 150 MW unit at around 10.30 pm and flames engulfed the whole unit. All the 17 engineering and technical staff had strived hard to put out the

flames. Eight officials had managed to escape from fire through an underground tunnel, the remaining nine members unable to come out from the plant and died of suffocation. A team of National Disaster Management and Singareni Collieries rescue teams which were pressed into service closed the power plant, after they found it difficult to deal with the situation.

The power plant had incurred a loss of Rs 1,000 crore due to the fire accident and another Rs 2,000 crore loss due to the stoppage of production. Efforts were on to summon the experts from Germany to restore the plant to get the motors repaired. Apart from German experts, several engineering experts have to be deployed from various institutions.

Meanwhile, the officials said that the plant required facilities like motors that could withstand high voltage, cabling system, starters and technical staff for supervision should be available as standby before launching the restoration works to overcome the technical snags and produce additional power production from these units. The experts revealed that the fire accident

took place because of failure to control high-voltage when the power being generated in high-voltage from all the units in the power plant. The question was now being raised as that why it was happening only in Telangana when many power plants were running successfully across the country with German technology.

The power plant has six units and each unit was producing 150 MW of power. The production was continuing in units 1,2,5 and 6, while production came to a grinding halt in 3 & 4 units due to a fire accident.

"The power generation is going at a nominal pace even in the four units and we need to wait for eight more months to bring normalcy in the production," the officials said.

Sharmila to go on hunger strike today for jobless

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Hyderabad police officials gave permission to YS Sharmila to stage hunger strike at Indira Park here for one day on Thursday from 10 am to 5 pm against the TRS-led state government, supporting the unemployed youth in state demanding the government to issue job notifications in TS.

In fact, Sharmila has sought permission from the police officials to observe hunger strike for three days.

The decision came following an announcement made by her at her Khammam public meeting to observe fast supporting the unemployed.

Odisha reports record 2,267 new cases, 3 more fatalities

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's COVID-19 tally mounted to 3,55,353 as the state registered this year's highest single-day spike of 2,267 new cases on Wednesday, a health department official said. The daily count crossed the 2000-mark for the first time in 2021, he said. The death toll rose to 1,933 as three more people from Bolangir, Ganjam and Jajpur districts succumbed to the disease. Talking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare Department said, "Regret to inform the demise of three COVID positive patients while under treatment in hospitals." Of the fresh cases, 1,314 were reported from quarantine centres and 953 detected during contact tracing.

India's National Education Policy is futuristic: Modi

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the new National Education Policy is futuristic and as per global standards. "India takes pride in being the mother of democracy as its values are embodied in our social life," Modi said addressing the Association of Indian Universities' 95th annual meet and a national seminar of vice-chancellors via video conference. The Centre unveiled the new National Education Policy (NEP) last year. "The National Education Policy is futuristic and as per global parameters," Modi said.

He said the role of skilled youth is continuously increasing as India walks the path of 'aatmanirbharta' (self-reliance). "Babasaheb Ambedkar has given a strong foundation for us to take forward all our democratic values after the independence," Modi said on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. The city-based Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University hosted the event. Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat and Chief Minister Vijay Rupani attended the meet.



Will probe Cooch Behar killings to track, punish culprits: Mamata

PNS ■ MATHABHANGA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday met family members of those killed in CISF firing during the fourth phase of assembly elections, assuring them of a probe that will track down and bring the culprits to book. Banerjee lamented that she could not meet the next of kin of the deceased earlier, owing to a 72-hour ban on entry of political leaders in Cooch Behar, where four people were gunned down by CISF personnel in "self defence", on April 10. "Our inquiry will track everyone responsible for the cold-blooded killing and ensure they are punished as per law," she said. Banerjee said she will also ensure justice for the family of Ananda Burman, an 18-year-old first-time voter who was shot dead outside a polling booth in the same district.



The Trinamool Congress supremo interacted with the family members of all the deceased, including the widows and parents of the four killed in firing, and the grandfather and maternal uncle of Burman. "I will come again immediately after the elections are over (May 2). We will help you in every possible way," she said. The chief minister also said a martyrs' column will be built in memory of the five who lost their lives. Four people were killed Cooch Behar's Sitalkuchi as central forces opened fire amid polling for the fourth phase allegedly after coming under attack from locals, who "attempted to snatch their rifles", police had said. Following the violence, the Election Commission put in place restrictions, including extending the "silence period" from 48 hours to 72 hours, for the fifth phase of elections, and barred the entry of politicians in the district for the next 72 hours from April 10, to prevent any possible law and order flare-up.

INDIA CORNER

Parties doing politics in name of Ambedkar: Mayawati

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Wednesday accused rival political parties of indulging in politics in the name of B R Ambedkar, and asserted that only the BSP can fulfil his dreams. In a statement issued here, Mayawati said that despite tremendous respect for Ambedkar in the country, he was not honoured with the Bharat Ratna for long, and for this "heinous crime", the Congress party can never be forgiven. "It was eventually because of the BSP's strong efforts that in 1990, he was honoured with the Bharat Ratna," Mayawati said. Taking a jibe at rival parties, Mayawati said political parties have penned history as per their own whims to instigate the people and for their vested interests, while the BSP, which was in power for four times, has made history by undertaking public welfare. The former UP chief minister also said that most of the public welfare schemes, which are running in the state and in the country, and which have been cited to seek votes, were started during the BSP government, and implemented in Uttar Pradesh.



4 held, 207 cartons of smuggled liquor seized

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

Police here have arrested four suspected bootleggers following a seizure of 207 cartons of country-made foreign liquor smuggled from Haryana, and allegedly meant for wooing voters during the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh, officials said. Police said they have arrested the kingpin of the alleged bootleggers, Ravi Jatav of Modinagar, along with his three accomplices Sonu, Nicky and Gaurav from Nabipur village. Seven other bootleggers are absconding, they said.

'PM negligent in tackling Covid'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With COVID-19 infections spreading rapidly in the country, the Congress on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being negligent, careless and callous in tackling the virus and jeopardising the lives of Indians, and asked him to follow 'raj dharma'. Congress general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the Modi government has been completely careless and cruel when it comes to ensuring life-saving drugs, providing oxygen and vaccines to Indians, and has proved incompetent in controlling the spread of the virus. India reported a maximum of around 1.85 lakh cases and 1,027 deaths due to COVID-19 on Wednesday and now has the second highest number of infections after the United States. Surjewala said while there is an acute shortage of vaccines across the country, the government is busy abusing state governments raising the issue with baseless and senseless allegations. He also demanded that the government agree to the requests of students by postponing or cancelling the CBSE board exams and not risk their lives by making them sit for the exams physically when infections are spreading fast.



'Efforts on to stop me from campaigning'

PNS ■ BARASAT/BIDHANAGAR

Minutes after the 24-hour ban on canvassing ended, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that efforts are on to stop her from campaigning and asserted she is a street fighter and won't be cowed down by the "intimidation tactics" of the BJP. Banerjee, who earlier in the day had conducted a 3.5-hour long dharna against the EC's decision to prohibit her from campaigning for 24 hours, said the people of the state would take a call on stopping her from campaigning whereas the saffron party leaders can campaign. "In the fifth phase (of polling on April 17), the silence period is 72 hours, and I could not campaign for 24 hours. So I cannot campaign for 96 hours. The BJP can campaign, and I am not allowed to campaign. I will not say anything, the people of Bengal will take a call on it. They are watching everything," she said while addressing a rally at Barasat. Asserting that she has been a street fighter and won't be cowed down by such "intimidation tactics" of the saffron camp, the feisty TMC boss said, "Efforts are on by the BJP and its agencies to stop her from campaigning." "The BJP wants to stop me from campaigning as they have sensed defeat," she said.

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Elderly man falsely accused of molestation, 3 held

Three women have been arrested for allegedly trying to extort Rs 10 lakh from a 61-year-old man in west Delhi by falsely implicating him in a molestation case, police said on Wednesday. Kiran (30) filed a complaint of molestation at the Rajouri Garden police station on April 7 against Dinesh Chand Mahajan, who lives in Tagore Garden Extension. Her medical examination was done the next day, according to police. During preliminary inquiry, it was found that the complainant was instigated by her sister -- Poonam (31) -- and Sonia (28) to make false allegations against Mahajan in order to extort Rs 10 lakh, an officer said. A police team was sent to Jaipur following information that the three had fled there. It traced a person who knew the three women, following which the suspects were apprehended, the officer said.



Covid: Delhi HC dismisses plea to defer DSGMC polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has dismissed a petition seeking postponement of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) elections, scheduled for April 25, on the grounds of unprecedented spike in COVID-19 cases. The high court said that once a decision to hold the election has been taken and the process has not been stopped in spite of rise in the number of infected persons in the city, which is functioning barring a few restrictions, the court would not interfere in such policy matters. A bench of Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Amit Bansal said once it is shown that guidelines for ensuring that the holding of election do not lead to spread of the virus any more than it is already taking place, the court would not interfere in such policy matters. "The respondent Delhi government as well as the central government is already taking all steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, without however restricting day to day life any more than necessary," the bench said. It added that besides the general restrictions put in place by the governments, each institution is taking its own steps for restricting the spread of COVID-19 virus. "We are confident that not only will Delhi government enforce guidelines already issued to prevent spread of virus during the election, a body as the DSGMC also, will take all possible steps to ensure that the conduct of elections is not a source of spread of the COVID-19 virus," the bench said in its April 8 order. A letter was sent to the Chief Justice on April 7 by petitioners Jagmohan Singh and Manjeet Singh Chugh, voters in the list maintained by the Directorate of Gurdwara Elections, and it was registered as a petition and placed before the bench.



Govt not going for lockdowns in big way, says FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday made it clear that the government would not go for lockdowns in a big way and only resort to local containment. In a virtual meeting with World Bank Group President David Malpass, Sitharaman appreciated the initiatives of the international financial institution to increase the lending space for India to enhance availability of finance for development. "FM @nsitharaman shared the measures being taken by India to contain the spread of second wave of pandemic including the five pillars strategy of test-track-treat-vaccination and #COVID19 appropriate behaviour," the finance ministry said in a tweet. "Even with the second wave, we are very clear that we are not going in for lockdowns in a big way. We don't want to totally arrest the economy. The local level isolation of patients, or households which have people in quarantines are the methods through which the crisis will be handled, the second wave will be handled. There shall not be lockdown," Sitharaman said.

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Gehlot for imposing strict anti-Covid norms in state

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday said it is necessary to take strict and effective steps similar to lockdown and directed officials to form guidelines to curb the virus spread. He appealed to the people to behave as if there is a lockdown, saying the second wave of Covid-19 is more dangerous. Gehlot said the socio-religious and cultural activities in the state need to be restricted as the death rate is increasing.

Neither prepared nor submitted report on Mumbai blasts: IB to HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Intelligence Bureau has told the Delhi High Court that it has not prepared or submitted any report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on the 2006 Mumbai train blasts. The submission has been made by the IB in an affidavit filed pursuant to the court's direction in January this year to state on record that it had not prepared any report in 2009 or shortly thereafter on the bombings of July 11, 2006 when seven RDX bombs ripped through as many Western line local trains in Mumbai killing 189 people and injuring 829. "It is respectfully submitted that no report was prepared and/or submitted in 2009 or any time shortly thereafter by the IB to MHA in respect of the 7/11 Mumbai bomb blasts," the agency has said in its affidavit, filed through central government counsel Rahul Sharma. The IB, also represented by advocate C K Bhatt, has further said that the case was investigated by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of Maharashtra Police. Justice Prathiba M Singh on January 27 had asked IB to record on an affidavit that it had not prepared any report in 2009 or shortly thereafter on the 2006 Mumbai train bombings case.



112 with criminal records externed from Muzaffarnagar

More than 100 people with criminal records have been externed from Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the panchayat elections, a police officer said on Wednesday. Senior Superintendent of Police Abhishek Yadav said 112 anti-social elements from different police station areas have been externed from the district for six months. Anyone found in the district would be arrested, the police officer warned. He said these people have been involved in several criminal cases in the past. Panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh will be held in four phases from April 15. Polling in Muzaffarnagar district will be held on April 19.



NGT refuses to entertain plea on unauthorised construction

The National Green Tribunal has refused to entertain a plea seeking direction to stop unauthorised construction in Ghitorni village in South West Delhi. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel said the issues of removing encroachment from the Gram Sabha land is in the purview of the Revenue Authorities and an order has already been passed by the Tehsildar in the matter. "In these circumstances, we do not find any substantial question of environment to be dealt with by this tribunal. The application is accordingly disposed of without prejudice to the remedies of the applicant at an appropriate forum," the bench said. The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by Kamran Siddique and others seeking direction to stop unauthorised construction in Ghitorni village in South West Delhi. According to the plea, encroachment in question, in the present case, is still continuing even though an order had already been passed by the Tehsildar Vasant Vihar. The plea stated that representation has also been given to the Police Commissioner, Delhi and reference has been made to certain orders by which Sub-Divisional Magistrate Saket has restrained from raising unauthorised constructions.



6 held for duping Japan nationals

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

Six people were arrested by the cyber cell team here Tuesday for allegedly duping Japanese nationals using social media sites on the pretext of updating their software at throwaway prices, police said. The accused had learnt the Japanese language at a Delhi-based institute for calling their prospective victims, DIG/SSP Amit Pathak told reporters. He said they were arrested from Gaushtala and Indrapuram areas. They have been identified as Ashish, Avinash, Edvin George, Adarsh, Umesh, and Vikram, he said. The gang used to contact elderly computer-friendly people in Japan after scanning their data on social sites through Skype and X-LITE APP, according to police. They used to demand Google scratch cards in turn of money for updating, the police said. The gang used to encash Japanese currency through currency changer brokers.



'India will raise its climate ambitions'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday said India will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure, and that it will not allow anybody to forget their historical responsibility. He also said that India is suffering because of the mistakes of others and "is not responsible for climate change that is happening". Javadekar made the remarks during a speech after a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian at the French Embassy. French minister Le Drian said the consequences will be disastrous if the world is not able to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, or even 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. That's why it is absolutely indispensable that all countries increase their climate commitments by the time the COP26 takes place in Glasgow, as required by the Paris Agreement, he said. "This increase in ambition must include setting new nationally determined contributions by 2030 and also long-term strategies to achieve carbon neutrality. We must stop building new coal-based power plants and it is essential that we progressively stop this mode of electricity production at a global level," Le Drian said. Javadekar said, "We will complete our commitments, raise our ambitions but not under pressure. And we will also ask countries to provide finance and technological support and about their (climate) actions." He said India is the only G-20 country to walk the talk on the Paris climate agreement and "we have done more than we promised". The minister said that the frequency of abnormal (weather) events has increased but "let us not forget that this is not a new phenomenon". "What we are suffering today was caused 100 years ago. European and American countries and China, in the last 30 years, emitted (greenhouse gases) and therefore, the world is suffering... India is suffering because of the actions of others," he said, adding that historical responsibility is a very important aspect in climate debate. "We cannot just forget it (historical responsibility), and we will not allow anybody to forget it," Javadekar said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Going all out

The Govt's decision to procure COVID jabs from abroad should be welcomed for a variety of reasons

The Indian Government's "vaccine *maitri*" may have earned it laurels among the nations that received the approximately 6.45 crore COVID shots, but it has left it clutching at straws and getting the flak in its own backyard. With the Coronavirus cases rising exponentially across India and with more deaths being recorded due to its new strains, the Centre is facing criticism that in its enthusiasm to earn global brownie points it put its own citizens at risk by distributing the shots to other nations instead of ensuring that all its citizens were inoculated first. As the second wave of infections tears across the country, there are calls for opening up the inoculation process for everyone as the new strain is not sparing children and the youth this time around.



Hence, faced with a shortage of the COVID jabs the Centre first gave the nod for the use of Russia-made Sputnik Vaccine for emergency use and moves are now afoot to enlarge the COVID-19 vaccine basket by giving approval to the shots manufactured in the US, the UK and Japan. The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEG-VAC) has recommended that shots being manufactured abroad as well as those which have already received approval for "restricted use by the USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan may be granted emergency use approval in India". It is understood that the "vaccines, which

are listed in the World Health Organisation's emergency use listing, may also be granted emergency use approval in India".

The decision has come at the right time as it would encourage imports of bulk drug material and help in optimal utilisation of domestic fill-and-finish capacity which will, in turn, provide a fillip to our vaccine manufacturing capacity and total job availability for domestic use. The Centre, trying its best to calm the citizens, has assured them that there is no vaccine shortage and over 1.67 crore doses are still available. While there is some strength in the argument that the Government should have catered to its citizens first, the fact remains that the healthcare authorities and the public, too, is to a certain extent responsible for the state we are in today. First of all, given the fact that vaccines are direly needed at this time, how do we explain the criminal average wastage of 6.5 per cent in India? Plus, if people had listened to the Government, got inoculated in massive numbers and observed the Corona protocols diligently, there would not have been such a surge in cases. When the number of infections dipped after the first wave, had we shunned vaccine hesitancy, things would have moved with assembly-line precision and a large part of the population would have had the shots by now. However, it's not too late and the Centre is doing its bit to provide succour to its citizens. We need to calm down, behave like responsible citizens and help the Government in its endeavour in any way we can. After all, this is a situation that none of us had ever faced before.

PICTALK



Nihangs show their horse-riding skills on the last day of Baisakhi Mela in Bathinda district

Elections in the time of COVID



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

With half the phases in the Bengal polls remaining, the virus management measures appear to be missing on the ground

The Congress candidate from the Srivilliputhur Assembly constituency, 63-year-old PSW Madhava Rao, passed away of COVID-19 complications five days after the Tamil Nadu election concluded on April 6. If he wins the election posthumously, the constituency will head for a by-election. Tamil Nadu is one of the 16 States in India experiencing a significant surge in fresh Coronavirus infections. However, the pictures of bulging election rallies/road shows that capture only people's indifference towards the virus. The wearing of masks seems to be a luxury rather than a compulsory practice.



The Election Commission of India (ECI) has laid down strict COVID-19 protocols for the elections in five States. It forms a part of the February 26 announcement of the poll schedule. The guidelines remain virtually unchanged since the Bihar Legislative Assembly election in October-November 2020. However, they seem to be honoured more in the breach than in observance, at least with regard to campaigning.

The instruction is that the District Election Officer (DEO), who is mostly the District Magistrate should identify dedicated grounds for public gatherings with clearly marked entry and exit points, put markers to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees, and the nodal district health officer should ensure that the COVID-related guidelines are adhered to by everyone in the district. The DEO and the District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by the State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. However, the swelling crowds at the rallies/road shows seem to throw these protocols out of the window.

While elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam were over by April 6, those in the State of West Bengal will continue till April 29. There,

only four of the eight phases have been completed until now. The elections are already scarred by violence, and the media is fully fixated on it. By contrast, the large-scale flouting of the pandemic norms has not engaged the media's attention sufficiently.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly exhorts people to wear masks and maintain physical distancing norms in public. He is emphatic that nobody should be lax about the COVID-19 protocols. These are indeed meant for the people's own safety, and tens of millions of ordinary Indians like me follow his advice in letter and spirit. However, does he follow his own advice at the mammoth rallies that he has been addressing frequently in West Bengal? The crowd strength at his rallies is so oppressive that there is hardly any place to stand. There was palpable fear of a stampede at his rally in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on March 7.

As the camera zooms in on different segments in the crowds at the Prime Minister's numerous rallies, it is easy to spot that masks are a rarity. Does Modi demand that those not wearing masks



AHEAD OF THE FOURTH GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1967, THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL SHOWED THE WAY FOR DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT THROUGH ALL-PARTY MEETINGS. THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA OFFICIALLY ADOPTED IT IN 1968

or flouting the social distancing norms should leave immediately? Far from it, the Prime Minister seems to be oblivious of the subject as he vigorously launches a broadside on Mamata Banerjee's "misrule". The official candidates of his party — who otherwise pretend to follow Modi religiously — throw their masks (read caution, please) to the wind while going to file their nomination papers or campaigning.

None of the political parties seem to behave responsibly against the threat of COVID-19. Their delinquency is punishable under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code as specified in Order No 40-3/2020-DMI (A) of November 25, 2020, by the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, there are hardly any publicised incidents of punishment on this account until now.

With respect to the Coronavirus, no political party can evade moral responsibility. They should have by themselves appointed nodal officers for ensuring COVID-appropriate arrangements. If

elect to govern, they themselves will have to deal with the pandemic upsurge. It is shameful that their behaviour should be COVID-inappropriate in public while seeking votes. The battle against the virus cannot be wholly dependent on vaccinations. Experience has shown that even those vaccinated can contract COVID-19.

The second wave of the pandemic has gripped India even as half the phases in the West Bengal election remain. It devolves upon all political parties to come together and take recognisable measures so that the poll campaign does not aggravate the situation. It might involve curtailing big rallies/road shows featuring star campaigners. One is reminded how ahead of the Fourth General Elections in 1967, the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal showed the way for developing a Code of Conduct through all-party meetings. The ECI officially adopted it in 1968. Such all-party meetings on the COVID-19 situation are the need of the hour.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE ARE NOT PREPARED AT ALL

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Double mutant strikes' (April 14). Your article is right on the money when it says that this variant multiplies quickly. You rightly raised the point about the lack of data and studies — that is peer-reviewed — it does not give the guarantee that these vaccines would work. One does need to be an Einstein to know that if things keep spiralling downwards, the day is not far when we surge past the US in becoming the worst-hit country.

We are importing vaccines but the recent halt in the rollout of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine in the US is also concerning as blood clots have been reported in patients who took this jab. It is bizarre that a country producing top doctors and scientists cannot figure out how this virus operates. The health briefings are an elephant dart to the public's face as all it does is present a rosy picture. It seems that our pandemic response is absolutely misguided and an absolute disgrace.

Sadly, our people could not refrain from going to events like the Kumbh Mela. Even the politicians are busy holding rallies as their priority is to win elections rather than to control the virus. All this has led to pandemic fatigue as people have been following the rules for long, for something that isn't even their fault. It's too late in the day to wish for this pandemic to have never afflicted humankind. The only thing to do now is to just mask up and stay home!

Sean Colin Young | New Delhi

EXERCISE CAUTION WHILE CAMPAIGNING

Sir — It doesn't behave Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak insultingly of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and repeatedly call her "Didi o Didi". Such words belittle the dignity of a woman and the Election Commission must take note of it. Mamata was right in saying that the way the PM is cracking jokes on her, it sounds like a young man making a pass at a local woman. This is certainly below standard. "I know many things about you, Modi and Shah. But I have the dignity not to stoop so low," she said. She targeted Modi, saying that

Punish vaccine hoarders



Amid the current surge in the number of Coronavirus cases, several States have reported the shortage of anti-viral drug Remdesivir. It is surprising that Gujarat BJP chief CR Patil has announced that 5,000 doses of Remdesivir would be made available free of cost by the party in Surat. But he didn't explain how he managed to get the stock despite the Government mandating that not more than six doses of medicine will be sold without a doctor's prescription.

The Government must respond and explain that when people are unable to get the

injection despite standing in queues for hours, how did 5,000 injections reach Patil? Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani's innocent response was that he is unaware of Patil's claim. "I don't know. Ask Patil," said Rupani. This response is careless and is not expected from a CM. It is a blatant case of corruption and a CBI inquiry must be initiated to find out how he managed to stockpile the Remdesivir injection. Worse still, this is the situation despite the Gujarat High Court pulling up the State Government over the worsening Coronavirus situation.

The COVID-19 patients are experiencing unimaginable difficulties due to the shortage of beds, oxygen and medicine supply and lack of proper testing and tracing. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that India has "walked the talk" on helping the world counter the pandemic despite its "limited resources", much is needed to be done to effectively deal with the rising COVID cases at home. Nailing the corrupt politicians who stockpile or hoard the vaccine is one such step.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

only someone who did not give due recognition to the women in his life can crack such jokes. However, Mamata also has crossed her limits several times in past.

Our political leaders must exercise caution while speaking in public. The common people follow the politicians blindly and such statements set a wrong precedent in politics. There are politicians like Uttar Pradesh's former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan who have made insulting remarks against women. The politicians should maintain dignity and decorum in public life.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

STOP THE HATE SPEECHES

Sir — The overzealous campaign of the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari, with the choice of abuses for our Islamic brethren, follows the culture of his new political masters. Sadly, such

leaders vouch for the constitutional ethos and cry "India first" at every possible opportunity! Despite the rampant abuse of religion and attempts to create a rift among communities, these leaders surprisingly are not prosecuted. Hate speeches have become the order of the day in elections.

These things work in elections since the people are still not educated or well-informed enough and fall into the trap of the political leaders. We will never have good and accountable governance unless and until we vote for those who are secular in the real sense and do not create rift among people. Else, we cannot continue to blame the politicians for our plight as we only vote them to power and give them the opportunity to make the laws to govern us.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The 'Tika Utsav' will continue for 10-12 days. Lockdown is not the solution for COVID-19 but vaccination, social distancing and wearing masks is.

Goa Chief Minister — Pramod Sawant

It is the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in bringing down infections and deaths. It has not been achieved by the vaccination programme.

British Prime Minister — Boris Johnson

I have always been fond of singing. It's my second love after acting. I am so glad that my fans have loved my renditions. I hope to do a lot more soon.

Actor — Sara Khan

I'm very happy with the progress of the team over the last 18 months. If we continue to build on this, I am sure we can defeat any team.

Indian hockey captain — Manpreet Singh

The UP Government is playing not with statistics, but with the lives of people. The situation in the State has turned explosive.

Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra

Double whammy

Our insouciance is responsible for the alarming rise in pollution and Corona cases in the Capital

Both the pandemic and the pollution have made life miserable for the residents of Delhi. It's a double whammy this year — unlike last year when Delhiites had some relief during the Coronavirus-induced lockdown as the level of pollutants fell drastically, thanks to the restriction on vehicular movement and the ban on industrial activity. However, this relief was short-lived since the Capital's air quality started to deteriorate with the lifting of curbs. As the COVID-19 cases surge towards another peak, Delhi is witnessing the worst air quality since 2018. As the country is fighting the pandemic with indigenous vaccines (now with the imported ones, too), masks, social distancing and the "Test-Track-Treat" methodology, it must also think of cutting down on pollution. We must remember that one's immunity plays a vital role in fighting the virus and pollution certainly doesn't help it. Hence, lowering the pollution level will only aid our fight against the contagion. The Particulate Matter (PM) is the biggest contributor to Delhi's pollution and



the main factors behind the increase in its concentration include vehicular emissions, biomass and garbage burning and industrial smoke effluents.

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting with the Chief Ministers stressed that there is no need for another lockdown as the country now has enough infrastructure to control the infection. But unfortunately the Governments have failed to control the pollution in Delhi — which is ranked the world's most polluted Capital and 10th most polluted city across the globe in the *World Air Quality Report 2020* by a Swiss air technology company, IQAir — and the only solution in sight to control the PM levels in the Capital is another lockdown. But it's not right to blame only the Governments as the citizens also are no less responsible for this pathetic situation. Actions like car pooling, switching off the ignition at stop signals, using public transport, use of electric vehicles, and so on, are far from being our habit. Similarly, simple things like wearing masks properly, maintaining social distance, sanitising hands regularly and strictly adhering to the COVID-appropriate behaviour are not followed, which helps the infection spread. Until we mend our ways, we are doomed to lose both battles, against the pandemic and the pollution.



FIRST COLUMN

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOUTH

If we want real integration, North Indians must study the history and literature of South India, too, right from school



MARKANDEY KATJU

All Indians, including those from the South, have read about the great Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, the Empire of Harshavardhan, the Mughal Empire, and so on in their school history books. But, how many North Indians have heard of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire (whose statue along with his two queens, still stands in the Tirupati temple), or of the great Chola and Pandya kings? Regrettably, very few North Indians would be aware of these great kings from the South. Most Indians have read the 'Ramayan' and the 'Mahabharata', which are epics about North Indian kings, and most Indians have read the works of Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, and the stories of Munshi Premchand. But how many North Indians have read the great Tamil epics 'Silappathikaram', 'Manimekalai', or the great Tamil treatise 'Tirukkural' by Tiruvalluvar, about whom the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati wrote: "Tamil Nadu is known throughout the world because of Tirukkural." How many have heard the 'Tiruppavai' by the poet saint Andal, which is sung in the month of January all over Tamil Nadu, or the great poetry of Subramania Bharati who wrote powerful verses for women's emancipation around 1910 much before anyone dared to do so in the country? Very few.



North Indians know of Hindustani music but how many know of Carnatic music, and its trinity of Tyagaraj, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri? Hardly any. How many North Indians have heard of the great Kerala social reformer Narayan Guru, who belonged to the low-caste Ezhava community and fearlessly criticised and campaigned against the inhuman caste system? Practically none. For long, North Indians have regarded South India as a dark land populated by uncivilised people and are blissfully unaware of the South's great achievements in various fields. Indeed in the 'Ramayan', Kishkindha, which is believed to be in the present State of Karnataka, was regarded to be a land populated by monkeys from whom Lord Rama raised a 'vaanar sena (monkey army)' to invade Sri Lanka. Regrettably, even today, many North Indians look down on South Indians due to their ignorance of the culture and achievements of the South. For instance, South Indian temples are massive and unbelievably beautiful. They reveal the high level of knowledge of architecture and geometry of the ancient and medieval South Indians. For example, the Brihadishwara temple of Tanjore is simply astounding and one wonders how the builders could use such huge stones to create it. In fact, it reminds one of the Egyptian pyramids. The gigantic rock relief 'Descent of the Ganges' in the ancient port city of Mahabalipuram, capital of the Pallav Empire, is truly amazing.

The large number of Roman coins found in South India show the extensive trade between it and ancient Rome from the time of Emperor Augustus (who reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD). This indicates how highly developed the economy in ancient and medieval South India was as they, unlike North Indians, were seafaring people, with extensive commercial contacts in Southeast Asia. The Chola king Rajendra Chola is believed to have executed military campaigns in Southeast Asia (Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and so on), which could only have been possible with the aid of a powerful navy. In Ilango's epic 'Silappathikaram' one comes across these lines: "May the Pandya king prosper, who ruled over the South, after conquering the Ganga and the Himalayas in the north." At first I thought this was only poetic exaggeration, however, later I read of credible accounts of a South Indian king (perhaps Rajendra Chola) leading a Napoleonic invasion of north India up to the Ganga and even beyond (apart from invading Sri Lanka, the Malaya peninsula, southern Thailand and so on.) If we want real integration of India, North Indians must study the history, culture and literature of South India, too, right from school and give the South Indians the respect they deserve.

(The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal.)

Irreconcilable differences?

While India insists on de-escalation in Eastern Ladakh, the Chinese prefer the status quo. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent



ANIL GUPTA

The 11th round of India-China military talks to defuse tension in Eastern Ladakh, that was held after a gap of nearly two months, has again ended without any major breakthrough. The marathon talks lasted 13 hours as has been the trend in the past, but the Chinese side this time was rigid and uncompromising. Ever since the successful disengagement of troops from the lake area and the Kailash Range in February this year, a stalemate exists as far as further disengagement is concerned from the areas of Hot Springs, Gogra, Demchok and over stopping of Indian patrols in Depsang.

Immediately after the disengagement was completed, the 10th round of talks was held between the military commanders of the two nations. But it failed to arrive at any consensus as far as further disengagement from the remaining areas was concerned. However, the talks were dubbed as "constructive" and both sides hoped for a fruitful outcome. A joint statement issued by the two countries after the talks positively appraised the disengagement from the lake area, terming it a significant step that would provide a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector.

Though the much-awaited 11th round has once again ended in a stalemate, there are two noticeable differences. Unlike in the past, no joint statement has been issued by the two nations. In another first, the Chinese side has responded with a statement from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the Press statement issued by the spokesperson of its Western Theatre Command instead of its Defence Ministry. The statement issued by the PLA was full of rhetoric and laced with diplomatic niceties, indicating that it may have been drafted at the Ministry level but was issued by the PLA. This indicates some sort of unhappiness or disagreement which may need intervention at the highest level.

The PLA's statement said, "We hope India can treasure the current positive situation of de-escalation in the China-India border regions, abide by related agreements reached by the two countries and the two militaries in previous meetings, meet China halfway and safeguard peace and stability in the border regions together"; once again reiterating the "half-way" offer rejected outrightly by India in the past. What's the point of talking about de-escalation when the Chinese have not even completed the promised disengagement?

A couple of weeks earlier, General Naravane, the Indian Chief of the Army Staff, had observed that the threat in Eastern Ladakh has "not gone away altogether" since the PLA was still maintaining its considerable troop strength in the "rear areas" as before. "De-escalation will take place only when these elements go back to their garrisons," he had said. The much-needed de-escalation still eludes both sides.

While the Indian side insisted on complete disengagement from Hot Springs, Gogra, Kongka La and Demchok, including the lingering issue of Depsang, the Chinese did not concede to troop pullback from these friction sites as earlier agreed to, leave alone discussing Depsang. The disengagement from the Depsang plains is believed to be the bone of contention since it is not directly relat-



TO WARD OFF ANY THREAT IN THE AREA, INDIA HAS ALSO BUILT UP A STRONG FORCE THERE, INCLUDING ARMOURED VEHICLES, THE LOGISTICS OF SUSTENANCE OF SUCH A LARGE FORCE AND KEEPING THE ARMOURED FLEET FUNCTIONAL IN SUCH EXTREME COLD WEATHER CONDITIONS IS A HERCULEAN TASK

The writer is a political commentator, security and strategic analyst. The views expressed are personal.



ed to last year's aggression. Hectic diplomatic activity had preceded the 11th round of talks for "maintaining peace and tranquillity and providing conditions for the progress of bilateral relations." The Indian Foreign Minister, in a telephonic conversation with his Chinese counterpart, had insisted on "early resolution of remaining issues along the LAC and disengagement at all friction points."

In a virtual meeting of the Working Mechanism of Consultation and Coordination on India China Border Affairs (WMCC), held in the last week of March, it was decided to hold the 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders as early as possible in order "to further ease the situation on the ground and jointly safeguard the hard-won peace and stability in the border areas."

All eyes were thus set on the 11th round of negotiations, hoping not only for disengagement from the remaining areas but also for the resolution of the Depsang imbroglio. So, the big question is, why are the Chinese so sensitive about this area and unwilling to concede? The Depsang plains are sandwiched between the Aksai Chin and Siachen glacier. Located at the height of 16,000-17,000 feet above sea level, the area provides good mobility to the armoured vehicles. The Karakoram Pass and the Sasser Law Pass, both strategically important to India and located within its territory, are on its flanks. Much of these plains had been

under Chinese control since the mid-1950s. Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) is also located adjacent to the plains. In 1962, the Chinese occupied much of the Depsang plains west of the DBO, with India left with a small bulge. The new road built by us to connect the DBO with the Shyok area and beyond is under the observation of the Chinese and remains vulnerable to its artillery fire. The area is strategically important because China and Pakistan can jointly threaten India with a pincer movement in a strategic collusion and cut off the vital area from the rest of Ladakh. Conversely, India can threaten Aksai Chin and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though a build-up for any large-scale offensive would pose serious challenges.

Apart from the varying perception of the LAC, another peculiar factor in the area is the Limit of Patrol (LOP). India and China differ on the alignment of the LOP as well. The Chinese perception of the LOP is almost 20 km beyond our perception inside our territory. The tensions in this area are not recent. The Chinese had intruded in the area in 2013 and again in 2015 during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping and then during the 2017 Doklam crisis.

The crux of the problem lies in both sides denying each other access to the Patrolling Points (PPs) located on the LOP. Earlier Indian troops had been patrolling up to PP 11, 12, 12A and 13 and had not moved beyond that till the perceived

LAC. But lately, the PLA has been preventing Indian troops from even patrolling till these PPs and the phenomenon has become more pronounced after the Doklam stand-off. Unlike the Chinese incursions in the Fingers Area (between Finger four-eight), the Chinese did not physically move into the area.

The Indian patrols can move in vehicles only up to an area called "Bottleneck" beyond which their movement is on foot. A kilometre or so beyond the bottleneck is "Y-Junction" where the route bifurcates, with one fork leading to PP10 to 12 and the other fork leading to PP13. When Indian patrols approach Y-Junction, the PLA troops come in vehicles from a nearby post and stop them from going further up to the LOP. In a *quid pro quo*, the Indian troops prevent the PLA's men from going ahead of the "Bottleneck" area to their perceived LOP.

To ward off any threat in the area, India has also built up a strong force there, including armoured vehicles. The logistics of sustenance of such a large force and keeping the armoured fleet functional in such extreme cold weather conditions is a Herculean task. While India insists on de-escalation in this area simultaneously with the others, the Chinese prefer the status quo. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent. Indian troops are still in possession of a feature in the lake area that can prove as a "trump card" for hard bargaining with the Chinese to secure our interests in the Depsang plains.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IN THE ELECTION, THE CONSCIOUS PEOPLE OF BENGAL HIT SO MANY FOURS AND SIXES THAT THE SEATS OF THE BJP HAVE BECOME CENTURIES. —PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



I CAN SAY THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER, THE BJP WILL NOT EVEN GET 70 OUT OF THE TOTAL 294 SEATS. —WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE

Time to bridge the healthcare gap and tap indigenous potential

There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development activities towards advanced health solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the disparity among the haves and have-nots in access to healthcare in the country. However, everyone should have working and living conditions that are conducive to good health. The collaboration of various stakeholders in the health sector, who must work as a team as well as individually, is essential to achieve a fairer and healthier world in which all members of society have access to quality healthcare services irrespective of their socio-economic status.



KM CHERMAN

The first step towards achieving universal access to affordable health services is to have uniform, unbiased and economical healthcare facilities available for all. This will help in early detection and treatment of various diseases and infections. Preventive healthcare measures are of

The writer is a Padma Shri awardee and a cardiothoracic surgeon credited with India's first bypass. He is Chairman and CEO of Frontier Lifeline Hospital. The views expressed are personal.

utmost importance in ensuring the overall health of a community.

While we have a plethora of health schemes in India like the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)' to cater to the health of our citizens, it's the execution part of such schemes that we lack in. Efforts are required to ensure that people are enrolled, databases are updated regularly and citizens avail the benefits of the scheme.

The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model can help in achieving the goal of accessible healthcare and realising the targets in the field. Private and Government entities need to collaborate and work in consonance, supplementing each other's effort. They have to come up with specific strategies for various sections, such as those below

the poverty line.

It is imperative to monitor health inequities and help provide better access to affordable and quality healthcare. Many people in our country struggle to avail primary healthcare services. It is important that the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in every State cater to the healthcare needs of migrant workers who are from varied backgrounds.

Fostering and nurturing indigenous technology is extremely important in building affordable healthcare infrastructure in India. There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development (R&D) activities towards advanced health solutions.

As far as possible, bureaucratic hurdles must be removed so that innovators and scientists are able to avail the benefits of various policy



initiatives. There has to be some provision for financial support and tax benefits so as to encourage these R&D entities. For instance, if a patient needs a heart valve replacement, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is an alternative to conventional heart surgery but the long-lasting results of it are still in question.

It seems that there is an industry-wide push to make

these procedures popular, without really thinking about the long-term results. Currently, these valves are highly expensive in India (approximately ₹22.5 lakh) owing to which a majority of the people cannot afford it. Even the cost of conventional valve replacement (approximately ₹3 lakh) is also out of reach for many. The solution is indigenisation. The Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) using Nitinol stents developed by the National Aeronautical Lab (NAL) and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is promising in this respect. Unfortunately, there has been no support from any Central Government agency.

We all know that several organs are received only from human donors and there is a wide gap in the supply and

demand. Today, science has reached a stage where these organs could be manufactured using one's own cells through the 3D printing technology or by using a biological scaffold — like a shark fin — on which it could be grown. Shark skin is another potential tissue substrate to create biological tissue in view of its inherent tensile strength and durability. The Governments, both Central and States, as well as financial institutions mainly banks, should support these initiatives.

Unfortunately, due to ignorance on the part of regulatory bodies and other law enforcing agencies, even the licence for producing or manufacturing these has been poorly formulated and prioritised. Another important area is the realm of stem cell research with its tremendous regenerative potential, but we

face too many hurdles in manufacturing and commercial production.

Further, it's critical to create awareness about various health issues in regional languages that people understand. Plus, there is a pressing need to emphasise upon the importance of nutrition and immunity development in maintaining individual health.

Vaccination can help in keeping vaccine-preventable diseases away but there are new viruses and strains that are being discovered every day. Recently, we have witnessed how the second wave of the COVID-19 virus has taken the country by storm. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that our population has a fairly strong immune system, along with affordable healthcare and indigenous R&D in medical science.

Infosys board approves up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Infosys on Wednesday said its Board has approved up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan, wherein the IT major will buy back shares at a maximum price of Rs 1,750 apiece.

The buyback is part of the Bengaluru-based company's capital return of Rs 15,600 crore, which also includes a final dividend of Rs 6,400 crore.

The shares will be bought back via the open market route through the Indian stock exchanges, a regulatory filing said on Wednesday.

From FY20, Infosys had enhanced its capital allocation plan and said it will return 85 per cent of free cash flow cumulatively over five years via buyback and dividends.

"We've declared Rs 6,400 crore of dividend and Rs 9,200 crore in the buyback. Our cumulative payout for FY21 and FY20, which are the first two years of the capital allocation policy, would have paid out 83 per cent of the 85 per



cent. So in that sense, I think this is completely in line with our policy and that's what the board also considered when deciding the amount of buyback," Infosys Chief Financial Officer Nilanjan Roy told reporters.

Trading was closed on Wednesday. Shares of Infosys had closed at Rs 1,398.60 apiece on Tuesday, down 1.91 per cent on BSE. The buyback price offered is over 25 per cent higher than the last closing price.

Elaborating on capital allocation exercise, Infosys statement said for FY 21, its board has recommended a final dividend of Rs 15 per share, and that together with the interim dividend of Rs 12 per share already paid, the total dividend per share for FY21 will amount to Rs 27, which is a 54 per cent increase over FY20.

American Depository Shares holders are permitted to convert their ADS into equity shares and subsequently opt to sell such equity shares on the

Indian stock exchanges during the buyback period, the filing said.

"Subject to the market price of the equity shares being equal to or less than the maximum buyback price, the indicative maximum number of equity shares bought back would be 52,571,428 equity shares (maximum buyback shares), comprising approximately 1.23 per cent of the paid-up capital of the company as of March 31, 2021 (on a standalone basis)," it said. Infosys will utilise at

least 50 per cent of the amount earmarked as the maximum size for the buyback i.e. Rs 4,600 crore, and purchase a minimum of 26,285,714 equity shares.

The Board has constituted a buyback committee comprising Chief Operating Officer (UB Pravin Rao), Chief Financial Officer (Nilanjan Roy), Deputy Chief Financial Officer, General Counsel and Company Secretary.

The buyback is subject to the approval of the members of the company by way of a special resolution and all other applicable statutory/regulatory approvals.

The public announcement setting out the process, timelines and other statutory details of the buyback will be released in due course, the filing said.

In August 2019, Infosys had bought back 11.05 crore of shares under its Rs 8,260-crore buyback offer. It had completed its maiden buyback of Rs 13,000 crore in December 2017, comprising 11.3 crore equity shares at Rs 1,150 per share.

IMPCL achieves highest-ever turnover of over Rs 160 crores

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With its products attracting more buyers, Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL), the public sector manufacturing unit of the Ministry of AYUSH, has recorded its highest-ever turnover of Rs 164 crore in 2020-21.

The company has recorded an all-time high profit of approximately Rs 12 crore, the A Y U S H Ministry said.

Its previous highest turnover was Rs 97 crore in 2019-20.

This growth is reflective of the fast-growing adoption of AYUSH products and services by the public following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement said.

Adding another feather in IMPCL's cap, the World Health Organisation

(WHO) recently recommended its 18 Ayurvedic products for WHO-GMP/COPP certification subject to certain observations in March 2021.

The WHO provides 'World Health Organisation, Good Manufacturing

Practices / Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (WHO-GMP/CoPP)' certification to companies after conducting an inspection.

This certification is an endorsement of the quality of IMPCL's products. It will help IMPCL to commence export of quality medicines.

IMPCL is one of the most trusted manufacturers of AYUSH medicines in

the country and is known for the authenticity of its formulations.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was able to cater to the needs of the country in the shortest time, probably the first company in the country to provide Immuno boosting medicines as

Auraksha Immuno Boosting Kit. At Rs 350, it is one of the lowest-priced such kits and is also available on Amazon. Nearly 2 lakh such kits have been sold in the last two months," the statement said.

At present, IMPCL is manufacturing 656 classical Ayurvedic, 332 Unani and 71 proprietary Ayurvedic medicines for various diseases spectrum.



MINISTRY OF AYUSH

सत्यमेव जयते



Fundraising through public issues more than doubled

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Wednesday said fundraising through public and rights issues surged 115 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, in 2020-21 as compared to last year, the ministry said.

Similarly, around 2003 issues of corporate bonds for an amount of Rs 7,82,427.39 crore happened in 2020-21, surpassing the amount raised (Rs 6,89,686.19 crore) through 1,821 issues for the fiscal year 2019-20, it noted.

Thus, it said, while the number of issues increased by 10 per cent in 2020-21, the amount raised increased by 13.5 per cent as compared to the previous financial year.

Rights Issue, respectively, as against Rs 21,382.35 crore and Rs 55,669.79 crore raised last year. This is an increase of 115 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, in 2020-21 as compared to last year, the ministry said.

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Global stocks follow Wall St higher after US inflation rises

PNS ■ BEIJING

Global stock markets and Wall Street futures rose Wednesday after traders shrugged off higher US inflation and a decline in Japanese machinery orders.

London and Paris opened higher while Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul rose. Tokyo was off less than 0.5%.

On Tuesday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index climbed 0.3% to a new high, propelled by tech and consumer stocks on optimism the vaccine rollout will allow business activity to return to normal. Johnson & Johnson fell 1.3% after US regulators suspended use of its single-dose vaccine to investigate possibly dangerous blood clots.

The US government reported consumer prices increased by a stronger-than-expected 0.6% in March, the fastest rate since 2012. Higher inflation normally fuels fears interest rates might be raised to keep prices stable, but the Federal Reserve has said the economy



will be allowed to "run hot" to ensure a recovery is in place. Traders "took the well-telegraphed inflation pick-up in stride," Stephen Innes of Axi said in a report. Markets also are "seemingly unfazed" by the J&J suspension.

In early trading, London's FTSE 100 was up less than 0.1% at 6,896.64. Frankfurt's DAX declined less than 0.1% to 15,222.10 while the CAC 40 in Paris gained 0.2% to 6,196.15.

On Wall Street, the future for the S&P 500 index was up less than 0.1% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial

Average was unchanged.

The Dow, which includes J&J, fell 0.2% on Tuesday. The Nasdaq, with more technology stocks, gained 1.1%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index advanced 0.6% to 3,416.72 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 1.3% to 28,855.83.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo shed 0.4% to 29,620.99 after government data showed February machinery orders fell by an unexpectedly wide margin of 8.5% from the previous month, adding to concern about the country's recovery.

Simplilearn partners with KPMG

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Online digital skill provider Simplilearn on Wednesday said it has tied up with KPMG in India to offer postgraduate programmes in digital business transformation and process excellence.

The KPMG in India and Simplilearn partnership will provide a high-touch learning experience to the professionals enrolling in the post graduate, who will gain a real-world perspective of digital lean and business transformation through business case studies and masterclasses, according to a statement.

The learners will also be mentored by experts from KPMG in India in person to help them apply the theoretical frameworks to solve real-world business challenges.

FMCG firms assure supply amid Covid curfew in Maha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG firms such as ITC, Parle Products, Marico, Emami and CG Corp Global on Wednesday assured uninterrupted supply of their products based on the learnings from the previous year's lockdown, even as surge in COVID-19 cases in India forced Maharashtra to declare a 15-day curfew while other states also impose various restrictions.

Maharashtra on Tuesday announced a statewide curfew from Wednesday, entailing stricter curbs on public activities, to curb spread of coronavirus but stopped short of announcing a full-scale lockdown. "There is a lot of learning that has gone in from last



year...this time things are far better managed. Companies have learnt how to deal with it.

"Governments have also learnt what they should be doing when they announce a lockdown," Parle Products Senior Category Head Mayank Shah told PTI.

Asserting that there is no worry on the supply side, he said, "There is much clarity this time. Things are smooth, even local administration knows and companies are better

geared up."

An ITC spokesperson said, "ITC has taken all necessary steps to ensure enhanced availability of products for consumers across all channels. Over the period of the pandemic, we have developed strong operating policies and agile organisational structures for dealing with all types of market constraints and volatility."

The spokesperson further said the company is confident that its robust supply chain system will ensure that all sales channels, including e-commerce are serviced adequately during this time. "We also now have a fully operational ITC e-store in six metro cities which can meet consumer requirements directly."

Govt appoints Anil Kumar on central board of SBI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State Bank of India on Wednesday said the government has nominated Anil Kumar Sharma, the executive director of the RBI, on its board with immediate effect.

Citing a DFS notification dated April 13, 2021, SBI said, "...the central government hereby nominates Anil Kumar Sharma, executive director, Reserve Bank of India as director on the central board of State Bank of India with immediate effect... until further orders, vice Chandan Sinha."

Madhavan elevated as Prez of Disney

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Walt Disney Company India and Star India on Wednesday elevated K Madhavan naming him the president of both the firms, effective immediately.

Since 2019, Madhavan has been the country manager for Star and Disney in India, overseeing their television and studios business.

In this new role, Madhavan will drive strategy and growth of the group in the country, with responsibility for the vast Disney, Star and Hotstar businesses and operations spanning across entertainment, sports, regional channels, and direct-to-consumer businesses, Rebecca Campbell, chairman of international opera-



tions and direct-to-consumer businesses at Walt Disney said.

His new role also includes oversight of channel distribution and advertising sales as well as local content production business that currently is responsible for creating 18,000 hours of original content across fiction, non-fiction, sports, and movies in eight languages, she added.

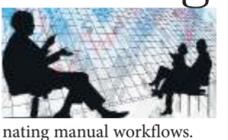
Nova raises USD 1 mn seed funding

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Nova Benefits, a corporate health insurance platform, on Wednesday said it has raised USD 1 million in seed funding round led by Multiply Ventures, Better Capital and Titan Capital.

Rupeek Gold Loans CEO Sumit Maniyar and Early Salary co-founder Ashish Goyal also participated as angel investors, a company release said.

Bengaluru-based Nova Benefits is an employee benefits platform centered around corporate health insurance. It helps save HR time by elimi-



nating manual workflows.

Through the platform, employees can access their insurance e-cards, find cashless hospitals and make claims.

The company plans to use the capital to integrate with insurance and HRMS companies, co-create a new category of health insurance products with insurers and expand its engineering and business development efforts, the release said.

'Long term policies needed for EV sector growth'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Central and state governments need to reduce uncertainty and roll out clear long term policies to enable growth of the electric vehicle sector in the country, according to CEEW Centre for Energy Finance's (CEEW-CEF).

The think tank also noted that the authorities need to work towards reducing the high upfront cost of electric vehicles (EVs) and enhancing charging infrastructure.

"Electric mobility is poised to be at the forefront of India's green recovery. In the coming years, the central and state governments need to reduce uncertainty by rolling out detailed and clear long-term policies," CEEW CEO



Arunabha Ghosh said in a statement.

Further, targeted efforts are needed to solve critical challenges such as higher upfront cost of EVs, lack of end-user financing, consumer's range anxiety, and inaccessible charging, he added.

Besides, the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME)-II scheme has achieved only 4.25 per cent of its sales targets till now, the

think tank noted.

"One major barrier could be that many potential EV buyers are unaware of the financial incentives available to them such as user subsidies and significant exemptions from road tax and registration fees," it added.

The CEEW-CEF, however, pointed out that the country's electric mobility sector is in a recovery mode having witnessed sales of around 1.35 lakh units in the 2020-21 fiscal. EV registrations formed 0.88 per cent of all vehicle registrations in the last financial year - the highest share ever achieved, it added.

The think tank also noted that the Indian automobile market has registered over 6.38 lakh EVs since 2011-12.

Two-wheeler and three-wheeler EV sales accounted for nearly 96 per cent of the electric mobility market in FY21, it added.

Further, the electric mobility dashboard noted that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Karnataka were the top three states in terms of EV sales in FY21.

Uttar Pradesh alone contributed 23 per cent of the country's sales, with 31,584 EVs sold in the last fiscal, it added. "The top 10 states together made 88 per cent of all EVs sold in India. Tripura, however, leads with the highest share of EVs per 1,000 internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, with 52 EVs sold for every 1,000 ICE vehicles in FY21," a CEEW-CEF analyst said.

MONEY MATTERS

Syska LED wins CESL tender to participate in Gram Ujala LED



Syska LED on Wednesday said it has won a unique tender of state-run Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) to participate in carbon finance based Gram Ujala LED scheme for rural India. "Syska LED has won a uniquely structured tender by public sector entity Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) to supply LEDs for homes in rural India based on carbon finance," a statement said. In a first-of-its-kind structure, the CESL had invited participation of bidders for co-investment on a revenue sharing basis, where costs and profits would be shared in a manner that will encourage public-private participation in climate change mitigation. In this tender, Syska is downside protected through a fixed price offered by CESL; upside from carbon credits is shared in equal proportion between the two parties.

McDonald's to mandate anti-harassment training



McDonald's will mandate worker training to combat harassment, discrimination and violence in its restaurants worldwide starting next year, the company said Wednesday. The training requirement will impact 2 million workers at 39,000 stores worldwide. "It's really important that we be very clear: a safe and respectful workplace where people feel like they're going to be protected is critically important for our business," McDonald's President and CEO Chris Kempczinski told The Associated Press in an interview. "It's just what society is expecting." The change is part of a larger reckoning over sexual harassment at McDonald's.

Amazon moves SC against Delhi High Court stay order



Future Retail on Wednesday said Amazon has approached Supreme Court against a Delhi High Court order which stayed a single judge's order restraining Future Retail Ltd from going ahead with its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Retail to sell its business. "The company's advocates are in receipt of communication dated April 13, 2021, from advocates of Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings LLC informing that Amazon has filed a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court of India against the captioned order dated March 22, 2021 passed by the Division Bench of the High Court of Delhi," Future Retail informed the stock exchanges. Future Retail said it will "defend the matter/proceedings through our legal counsels". On March 22, the Delhi High Court stayed a single judge's order restraining Future Retail Ltd (FRL) from going ahead with the deal with Reliance Retail to sell its business, which was objected to by US-based e-commerce giant Amazon.

Design of ToU framework for electricity tariff in Gujarat



Pricing of electricity is one of the key challenges in the efficient functioning of the power sector. Electricity tariffs typically do not reflect the true costs of generation, transmission and distribution in India. Knowledge about the demand-price relationship, consumers' willingness-to-pay for electricity, and demand forecasts are necessary to plan the supply and design of tariff structures. Increase in distributed energy resources (DER) such as solar photovoltaic (PV), wind turbines and electric vehicles (EVs) will result in unanticipated peaks in demand-generation balance leading to huge stress on the power system equipment and networks. Typically, in most cities, the last 100 MW of the peak demand is experienced for about 100 hours or less in a year; and creating an entire infrastructure to meet this load makes the whole system uneconomical.

THE POWER OF PLAY



NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR KIDS ON THE STREETS

To ensure a life of dignity and respect for the children in street situations in Hyderabad city by ensuring a legal identity, and thereby access to their entitlements as rights, Save the Children has joined hands with Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation.

On the occasion of International Day for Street Children, J. Srinivasa Rao, Chairperson, Telangana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights virtually launched a collaborative project for the children living in street situations, 'Making #TheInvisibles Visible through Legal Identity in Hyderabad City' in the presence of Latifa Shaikh, Child Champion from Mumbai, Sri. Aswin Lakshmanan, Director - Strategy and Planning, Verizon India and leaders from Save the Children.

To begin with, the year-long project will ensure a legal identity document to over 5000 CISS to enable them to be visible on the government records and avail schemes for which they are eligible for their overall well-being and future growth. The project brings in multiple stakeholders including State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, District Child Protection Unit, Department of Women and Child Welfare, Child Welfare Committees, State Juvenile Police Unit - Hyderabad Police and other civil society organisations on a common platform to bring about a collective impact on these lives.

Srinivasa Rao, Chairperson,

Telangana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said, "I appreciate Save the Children for taking up such initiative to work on the issues of children living in street situations. It has been one of our major areas of work, addressing the issues of children in street situations. We need all the stakeholders to come together and address the issues holistically. I call for a detailed discussion on chalking out a plan of working together to promote and protect the rights of children in street situations. Giving an identity to them is an important beginning. I appreciate all the partners for coming together to make the launch a huge success. SCPCR will also be there to support not just 5000 children but every single child lives in street situations in Hyderabad."

Highlighting the importance of this collaborative initiative, Aswin Lakshmanan, Director - Strategy and Planning, Verizon India said, "We are happy to partner with Save the Children to provide a new lease of life to these homeless and underprivileged children through a legal identity as citizens of our country. Driven by our purpose of moving the world forward together, we are working closely with the communities around us to enable economic, environmental and social advancement. With this initiative, we aim to provide a robust support system for the street children by ensuring access to basic facilities, empowering them with information and awareness on their rights and entitlements and helping them lead their life with dignity and respect."



has now become a life goal. The aim of starting 'Play First' is simple: To enable children to respectfully enjoy play, to enable parents and teachers to value play and design their own role in the play journeys of their children, to enable individuals to find their play and live a quality life, to bring the study of play to formal teacher education programs of the country, and to make more people aware about play, its power and thus creating play champions in our society."



- time, duration, space, material, people, and activities. Interventions of any kind must be done in the spirit of enabling children to decide for themselves."

Play First points out how children have been playing for millennia, adults have responded to their need to play intuitively all this while. However, the sharp discontinuities which have occurred in the last three decades in children's play lives, they say, need deliberate thinking and conversation about it. Thinking and talking about play is the new need of the new world order! Nisha, who has been working as an educator for more than a decade now, has also led different teams in schools as a teacher educator, principal, and coordinator. As a Global Certified Trainer for Play for Peace, she has facilitated sessions for children, youth, and adults in rural and urban contexts on life skills, teaching, equity, and inclusion. With Play First, she hopes to work with parents and sharing the value of play,

and supporting them to design a role for themselves to nurture their children's play and thus their lives. Play First will also work with schools and teachers, enabling schools to make play an important part of each school day - designing play spaces, designing sustainable material and practices to nurture play.

Nisha hopes more and more parents and educators will join her in the cause. "We hope to build a perspective about play and its value by designing and delivering a module that can be plugged into various pre-service teacher education programs. There's only so much I can do here. When a teacher, before her/hershe is corrupted by the limitations of the system, can form this perspective, the lives of many children can be positively impacted," Nisha believes.

It's time we stop seeing play as just instruments to teach a subject and enable every child to make the most of this enriching experience.

At 'Play First', they believe that each adult working with children is doing his/her best for the well-being of the children. The intentions are always beautiful and a bit of information and perspective can enable them to make more informed choices about children's lives. Talking about how play is a biological process, Nisha informs, "Play is always happening whether it's allowed or not. Whilst the children have to play and will play because they are built to play, our endeavour must be to respect this fundamental need and create enabling play environments. We must remove the barriers like lack of time, lack of space, lack of companions, lack of material, lack of autonomy, and other such basic things from our children's environment. As adults, all that we can do is to create an environment, the blueprint of how to play and what to play is already there with each child. Play is a state of mind which can be achieved when the child has the freedom to choose



there is no evidence so far that a wrong way of administering a vaccine can affect its efficacy; however, it can increase pain, swelling and reduce the range of motion in that area," he says. Dr Arunesh Kumar, Senior

Consultant & Head Respiratory Medicine/Pulmonology, Paras Hospital agrees with Verma and tells you that there is yet no vaccine that guarantees 100 per cent protection against the corona

virus. "Even if you are vaccinated, you must follow the safety rules suggested by doctors. Vaccination is a must to reduce the transmission rate and thus everyone must get it. Even after receiving the

Covid-19 vaccine, we must continue taking all precautions like the use of face cover or masks, hand sanitisation and maintain distancing. These behaviours must be followed both at the session site and in general. Vaccination reduces the severity of disease and reduce the transmissibility of virus," he explains.

However, the rising concerns may raise doubts in the mind of the people about getting vaccinated. But, experts say this is not the way out.

"One shouldn't be apprehensive about getting the vaccination done. While it doesn't provide 100 per cent efficacy, it is still the best bet. Keeping in mind the current situation, it is imperative that we must be on optimum guard. Even after getting the vaccination done, one must follow all the safety precautions that are laid out by the Government. Becoming complacent is one of the major reasons of people catching the infection even after the getting the jab," Dr Verma tells you.

Dr Satish Kaul, HOD and Director, Internal medicine, Narayana Hospital, Gurugram, says that vaccines are surely safe if doses are taken within prescribed time that too with all required precautions.

"We need to understand that vaccine basically provides protection from the severity of the disease; it saves us from getting chronically sick. It potentially saves us practically from ICU, ventilators and oxygen support, it helps to weaken the mechanism of disease in human body. Hence, vaccine beneficiaries are supposed to continue wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and Covid appropriate behaviour even after getting vaccinated," he suggests.

Also after taking second dose be extra cautious for at least two weeks, follow all precautionary measures. "Experts believe that one has to not get infected for at least two weeks after getting the second dose in order for the vaccine to be effective. Hence, these two weeks are the most crucial," Kaul adds.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy! Despite the truth of this saying, we come across parents and educational institutions who restrict playtime for children of all ages. Nisha Sharma of 'Play First', which aims to revolutionise 'play' in the country, talks to *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA about the need for play, its role in both classrooms and the personal development of a child, and more.

We know often we've seen parents 'rewarding' children with playtime for good behaviour or as positive reinforcement for having finishing chores, or homework. That's probably how it worked for most of us too. But did you know that play is a basic right of a child recognised by United Nations Convention for Right of the Child? This only shows the kind of impact 'play' can have on a child's development. Raising awareness and educating schools and parents about the saw is the organisation 'Play First', founded by Nisha Sharma.

Having been in the field of education for the last 15 years and working with children and adults of different age groups, Nisha's passion for exploring play and essential life skills with learners of different ages has only grown. As a mother, the birth of her son allowed her to observe, pause and reflect on how

play is unfolding in her son's life and the role it is playing. As a play enthusiast and trained play facilitator, she educated herself about the play by attending different conferences, being a member of playgroups, familiarising herself with the research in the field, conducting play sessions, and observing children at play. "As an experiential educator and a certified global trainer for 'Play for Peace', I realised that the flow which is generated during play is unparalleled. People are their own selves, they lose all their inhibitions and the connections built and discoveries made about oneself and the others are immensely powerful. I have been enamoured by this power of play for the last around seven years," Nisha tells us. Talking about the kind of learning she had as she saw her son growing up, she says, "The pure joy and control which a little infant (now a toddler) can feel during his uninterrupted and self-initiated play are

difficult to describe in words. Observing my son at play and the other children playing alongside him, intrigued me more about getting to know the biology of play. I started using my observations, my experience, and available research on play in a systematic manner to support this personal journey of my child and myself."

The amount of research happening in the field of play in the whole world is astonishing. No matter how one defines play, which methodology one uses to study its impact, the results have always been in favour of play. Play has been established as a fundamental and biological need of all animals, including humans. This renewed understanding of play and the paradigm of play as a right of children, made Nisha delve deeper into the nuances of play. "There are several questions which she got answers to in the last three years and there are many which are yet to be explored. This discovery



The growing cases of Covid-19, which includes people who have been fully vaccinated also testing positive, has raised an alarm. *The Pioneer* speaks with doctors who reason and explain why vaccination is still the best option.

Vaccine still best bet

Soon after the reports of doctors getting COVID positive even after receiving both the vaccine shots made headlines, the efficacy of the vaccine came under question.

With people wondering why to get vaccinated if one can anyway get infected with Coronavirus, doctors believe it is still the best bet.

"It is not correct to think that getting vaccinated will prevent one from catching the infection. A fully vaccinated person can still be infected but the viral load of such a person will be far less than someone who is not

vaccinated or partially vaccinated. The antibodies produced by the vaccine helps in fighting off the virus, which in turn, reduces the chances of that person transmitting the virus to other people," Dr Deepak Verma, Internal Medicine, Columbia Asia Hospital, tells you.

There are reports that not administering the jab at the right spot can be one of the reasons of a person catching the virus, however, Dr Verma dismisses all these facts.

"The vaccines approved for use in India are intramuscular in nature and a vaccinated person getting Covid has got nothing to do with how a vaccine is administered -

what's brewing?

PARTY



● Kusum



● Akshhatha



● Pratyusha



● Tazaienath



● Lokender Jain and Poonam



● Silpa

COFFEE, GREENS, AND MORE

Cafe Tree House is set to become the new hotspot for youngsters in town. A cafe with a serene and mystic ambience, the new place was unveiled at Country Club, Begumpet. The cafe offers special multicuisine menu for food connoisseurs of Hyderabad. Food lovers graced the unveiling and cheered for their favourite cricket team on the big screen during the launch of the cafe.

Photos by SV Chary

Huma's blink-and-miss appearance in *Army of the Dead* trailer

The trailer of the much-anticipated zombie thriller film *Army of the Dead* dropped. The film comes from the director of *Justice League* series of movies, Zack Snyder. The trailer is gripping from the word go. Expect some high-octane action sequences and some edge-of-the-seat moments from this upcoming film by Snyder. Starring Dave Bautista, Ella Purnell, Omari Hardwick, Ana de la Reguera, Theo Rossi and Hiroyuki Sanada, *Army of the Dead* marks Huma Qureshi's Hollywood debut. The actress also makes a blink-and-miss appearance in the trailer. The trailer of *Army of the Dead* begins with casino boss Bly Tanaka (Hiroyuki Sanada) approaching former zombie war hero Scott Ward (Dave Bautista) with a proposal. Scott, who leads a quiet life working as a chef in a humble eatery now, is approached to enter Las Vegas, a zombie-infested quarantined zone to retrieve \$200 million lying in a strip club. Scott is offered \$50 million for the job. He accepts the proposition, builds a team and enters the zombie-infested land. Scott and his team have to retrieve \$200 million and dodge the zombie attack. Mind you, these are alpha zombies - smarter and much faster. Huma Qureshi appears to be a survivor of the zombie attack. Huma Qureshi is playing a small part in the Zack Snyder-directed film, the actress revealed. Sharing the trailer of the film, Huma wrote, "Super proud to be a small part of this genius man's vision @ZackSnyder always a fan and friend forever (sic)." *Army of the Dead* will release on Netflix on May 21.



FUN

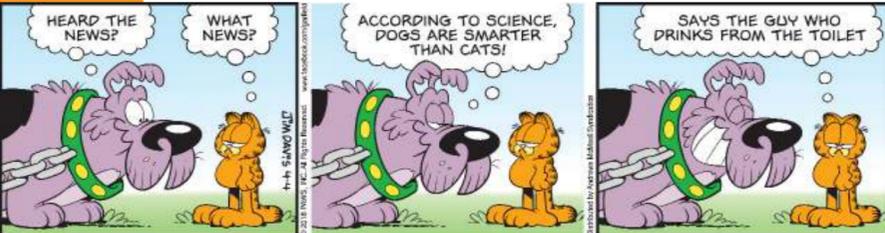
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



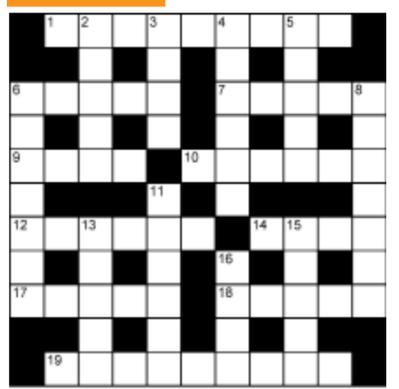
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Dirty and unhealthy air or water
- 6 More than is needed
- 7 Water covering land that is usually dry
- 9 A female relation
- 10 A symbol on playing cards
- 12 A passenger needs this
- 14 Famous singer or actor
- 17 Run after trying to catch
- 18 Sooner than expected
- 19 Squashed
- 6 Stretchy stuff in clothes
- 8 Wreck completely
- 11 Choose
- 13 Move along on hands and knees
- 15 The number in a trio
- 16 At this place

DOWN

- 2 Frequently
- 3 Jump over
- 4 A chewed sweet
- 5 Bad smell

SOLUTION



SUDOKU

			7					1
	3			1	9			4
4		1	6			8		2
		4		5			2	7
9	6	2						9
8		7			3	1		6
	9		4	2				3
3			7					

Yesterday's solution

8	3	2	4	1	7	9	5	6
1	9	7	2	5	6	3	8	4
4	6	5	8	3	9	7	1	2
7	1	3	5	4	2	6	9	8
2	5	8	6	9	3	4	7	1
9	4	6	1	7	8	5	2	3
6	7	4	9	2	1	8	3	5
5	2	9	3	8	4	1	6	7
3	8	1	7	6	5	2	4	9

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.



WE NEED MORE FILMS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: PRAKASH RAJ

Actor Prakash Raj who is riding high on the success of *Vakeel Saab*, speaks to K RAMYA SREE about his association with Pawan Kalyan, exchanging ideologies, future projects, and more

aspects in mind, the courtroom drama was been designed." Speaking about his association with Pawan Kalyan, the Varsham actor shares, "Vakeel Saab is close to Pawan's ideologies. This story is relevant to him. During a few scenes in the film, it felt like those dialogues came straight from his heart. Keeping his image intact, Pawan delivered a terrific performance on women safety and empowerment."

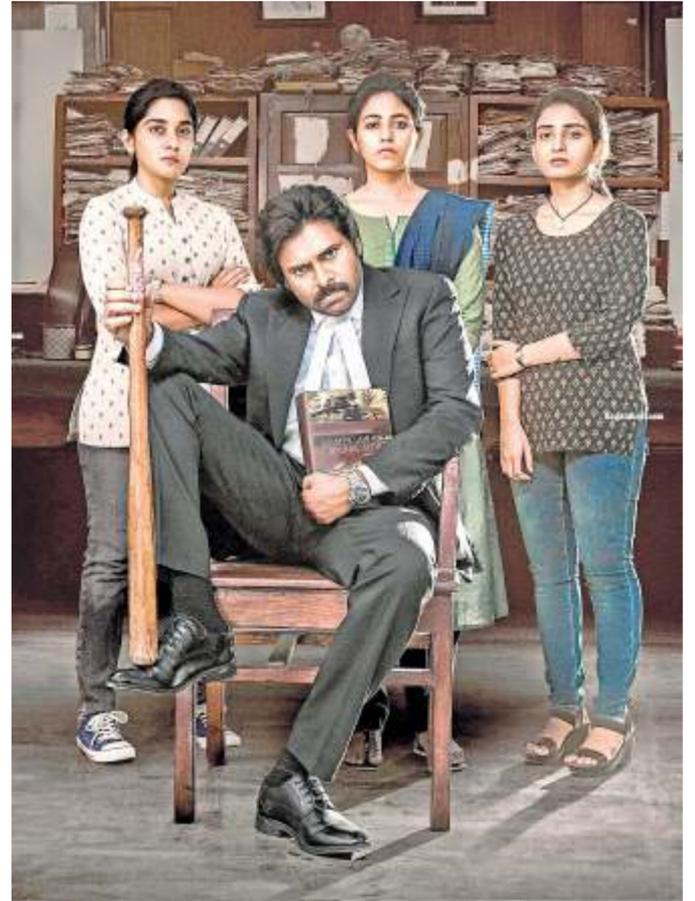
For a film to be successful, story, screenplay, dialogues, play a key role. Prakash Raj feels the same. He says, "If anyone tells me the film is a hit because I'm in it, I take it as a compliment and consider it as their love towards me. Anybody can do the kind of acting I do if the storyline is perfect. When I came onto the sets of *Vakeel*

Saab, it felt like I really was in a courtroom." Sharing one of the instances on sets, he said, "When I came to sets at 9 am one day, Pawan Kalyan reached the set by 7 am. When asked why he was early, he replied, 'I couldn't sleep, so I reached the sets early'."

He goes on to add, "Although Pawan and I have varied opinions regarding politics, when it comes to acting, we respect each other's work. On the sets, Pawan and I discuss a lot of

issues. We exchange books on poetry and current affairs. Pawan and I have a few thoughts on the welfare of the public. We want to do more films on women's empowerment. And men must change. It's the parents' responsibility to teach their sons their responsibilities and respect for women from a tender age."

The actor said he was heartbroken when he had to ask a few questions to the actresses while shooting for the film. "As an actor, it's my job to act; but I felt really guilty after every shot," he said.



VAKEEL SAAB NOT COMING ON OTT ANY SOON

Ever since the covid-induced lockdown, OTT has become everyone's go-to spot for all the latest shows. Ever since the release of Power Star Pawan Kalyan-starrer *Vakeel Saab*, the talk of the town is that it will premiere on OTT giant Amazon Prime on April 25.

However, Dil Raju's production house took to its Twitter handle and clarified that *Vakeel Saab* will not be streamed on

any digital platform any soon and he asked everyone to watch the film in the cinema halls.

Dil Raju refuted the rumor and said in a video said that until *Vakeel Saab* completes 50 days of its theatrical run, it will not be streamed on any digital platform.

It is known news that Amazon Prime Video bagged the streaming rights of *Vakeel Saab* for a high price of Rs 30 crore.

Versatile actor Prakash Raj was recently seen playing a lawyer in Pawan Kalyan's courtroom drama *Vakeel Saab*. The actor opened up about working for *Vakeel Saab*, and shared, "When the audience watches this film, they will connect with a previous film of mine and Pawan — *Bhadri*. The way they loved me as Nanda in *Bhadri*, the audience showered me with the same kind of love for my role as Nanda in *Vakeel Saab* too." Prakash Raj said the direc-

tor named his character Nandakishore on purpose. "Not just conveying a message, the director wanted the film to be entertaining as well. I loved the way the audience enjoyed it when Pawan Kalyan called me Nanda ji and Nandagopal in *Vakeel Saab*," he said.

He further goes on to add, "However message-oriented the film might be, it is as important to keep the audience entertained and when they step out of the theatre, they should feel happy and enjoy the moments they watched. Keeping these



We're entertainers, not fact-checkers, says Samantha

Actor Samantha Akkineni spoke her heart out against judging actors for not voicing their opinion on important issues in a witty Instagram post. Taking to her social media, she shared a reel as she took part in the 'What did she say' challenge. The text on the video read, "Them: We need your opinion on 'this important topi'. Me: Wondering since when did actors' opinions matter soooooo much."

The caption with her post read, "We're entertainers, Not fact-checkers. Why are actors crucified for having an opinion about the important matters pertaining to the world? We are humans too and We

make mistakes too. But canceling us for speaking out or not speaking out aloud on each & every topic is a bit unfair, don't you think? Let us stick to what we do best .. making you fall in love with our performances #whatdidshe say is a fun way to speak your mind .. what's on your mind ? #reelit."

Several celebs and her fans reacted to her post and supported her on the matter. Yami Gautam wrote "spot on", Pragya Jaiswal said, "haha..love it!!" Vimala Raman commented, "Love it haha" on the post.

'What Did She Say' challenge encourages men and women to express how they went against societal norms.

The *Rangasthalam* actress made it clear that an actors' job is to entertain first and the rest comes next.

On the work front, Samantha will be seen in *Shaakuntalam*, a mythological drama film, written and directed by Gunasekhar and produced by Neelima Guna and Dil Raju. She will mark her digital debut with the second season of the popular Hindi series *The Family Man*.

Mahesh begins SVP shoot in Hyderabad

Mahesh Babu's much-awaited film *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* has finished its first leg of shooting in Dubai. The actor has gone back to work to start the second schedule of *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* in Hyderabad, the makers and the team are taking utmost measures to run smoothly amidst the pandemic and follow all the new guidelines. Mahesh Babu will shoot for the film alongside Keerthy Suresh and the two are super kicked for this drama entertainer.

The first look of *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* showed us Mahesh Babu's hands holding a big ring of keys.

According to previous reports, the makers are planning for a 2022 Sankranthi release.

The superstar even has SS Rajamouli's next in his kitty, where the two will collaborate for the first time.



Aparichitudu remake: Shankar to direct Ranveer Singh

After he shelved *Indian 2* midway, Tamil hit machine Shankar is lining up projects. It is very well known that Shankar will be directing Mega Power Star Ram Charan for a bilingual.

He now announced to direct Bollywood star Ranveer Singh in the official adaptation of his 2005 Tamil blockbuster *Anniyan*, which stars

Vikram, which was dubbed into Telugu as *Aparichitudu*. The film is slated to go on the floors in Mid 2022. The director is thrilled to make *Anniyan* for the pan-Indian audience.

The yet-untitled project is being announced around the auspicious time of Baisakhi in North India and Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, which marks the New Year celebrations in these respective calendars.

Ranveer says: "I am blessed to have this opportunity to be a part of the spectacular cinematic vision of Shankar sir. He is an exception to the norm, a true disruptor who has shown us that no vision is large enough to achieve on screen. I had always hoped and dreamed that I would get a chance to collaborate with him, and I have a strong feeling that we will create magic together."

Ranveer shared that to

lead a film like *Anniyan* is a dream come true for any artiste."

"Vikram Sir, one of our country's finest talents, an artiste who I hugely admire, gave a colossal performance in the original, one that can never be matched. I can only hope that my interpretation and rendition of the part also connects with audiences in the same way," he said.

Calling it a "once-in-a-lifetime performance

piece", Ranveer added: "I am ready to give this role every single ounce of my being. Shankar Sir is a genius filmmaker and a true visionary. Words don't do justice to just how excited I am at the prospect of being directed by him."

Expressing his excitement, director Shankar said: "For it to be made into a Hindi film, *Anniyan* needed a maverick, charismatic showman like no other to play the part. I found this in the mercurial Ranveer Singh because he is a one-in-a-generation actor who has shown us that he can immortalise a character through his stellar performance."

"I'm confident that this powerful story will strike a

chord in the hearts of all," he added.

Anniyan is a psychological action thriller that revolves around a disillusioned man, whose frustration at what he sees as increasing social apathy and public negligence leads to a split personality that attempts to right the system.

Talking about the Shankar-Ranveer creative coup, Dr. Jayantilal Gada, Chairman and MD of the production house Pen Studios said: "Shankar and Ranveer are two forces of nature and them coming together is the biggest cinematic event in India."

The film will be co-produced by God Bless Entertainment.



SRH keep RCB down to 149/8

Holder takes 3/30 as Maxwell's first IPL fifty (59) since 2016 helps RCB to reach fighting total



Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper David Warner chats with his teammates during IPL game between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Sunrisers Hyderabad ©IPL

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Glenn Maxwell hit a 41-ball 59 to lift Royal Challenger Bangalore to a modest 149 for eight against Sunrisers Hyderabad in an Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

SRH bowlers, led by West Indian all-rounder Jason Holder (3/30) and star spinner Rashid Khan (2/18), put up superlative show and picked up wickets at regular intervals.

For RCB, Maxwell was the top

Innings	Player	Time Span
49	Yusuf Pathan (2010-13)	
48	Deepak Hooda (2015-20)	
44	Dwayne Bravo (2009-15)	
40	Glenn Maxwell (2016-21)	

scorer, hitting five fours and three maximums with skipper Virat Kohli (33) Shahbaz Ahmed (14) and Kyle

Jamieson (12) providing valuable contributions.

Put in to bat, RCB were off to a decent start with Kohli and opener Devdutt Padikkal (11) hitting a few boundaries.

However, Sunrisers didn't have to wait long for their first breakthrough as a back of the length delivery in the third over by Bhuvneshwar Kumar (1/30) spelled the end of Padikkal, who had returned after recovering from COVID-19.

Shahbaz Ahmed was the next to



Sunrisers Hyderabad all-rounder Jason Holder celebrates wicket of Glenn Maxwell ©IPL20.com

THE LAST TIME ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED A TARGET UNDER 155 WAS IN APRIL 2009 WHEN THEY DEFENDED 145 AGAINST KXIP IN DURBAN IN 2009

"As a spinner, you'd love such tracks, it's slow and there's a bit of bounce, but you need to be accurate with the line and length. If you back up your strengths, you can perform on this surface" —RASHID KHAN

depart after playing a quick cameo, leaving RCB at 47 for two.

At the halfway mark, Maxwell raised the tempo as the big-hitting Australian smashed Shahbaz Nadeem (1/36) for two sixes and a four in the first three balls of the 11th over, with Kohli joining the party with a bound-

ary.

The two stitched a 44-run partnership before Jason Holder got rid of the RCB skipper as wickets continued to fall at regular intervals.

With AB de Villiers in the middle, SRH captain David Warner introduced spin once again, bringing on versatile leg-spinner Rashid, and the move immediately paid dividends. The dangerous South African slapped the ball straight to Warner at covers with the slow nature of the Chepauk track coming to the fore once again.

The Afghan spinner struck once again, getting rid of Washinton Sundar (8). With Dan Christian also gone, Maxwell smashed three fours and a maximum in the last three overs.

PLAYER	RUNS
1. Nitish Rana (KKR)	137
2. Sanju Samson (RR)	119
3. Glenn Maxwell (RCB)	98

PLAYER	WKTS
1. Andre Russell (KKR)	6
2. Harshal Patel (RCB)	5
3. Rashid Khan (SRH)	4

MOST SIXES	COUNT
1. Sanju Samson (RR)	7
2. Deepak Hooda (PBKS)	6
3. Nitish Rana (KKR)	6

SUMMER SLAM

MOTION PICTURE



Chennai Super Kings players Narayan Jagadeesan, R Sai Kishore, Suresh Raina and C Hari Nishaan don traditional dress on occasion of Tamil New Year ©ChennaiIPL



Delhi Capitals pacer Kagiso Rabada bowls during training session after he completes six-day quarantine ©DelhiCapitals

KOHLI FLOATED IDEA OF MAXI JOINING RCB

All-rounder Glenn Maxwell said that RCB captain Virat Kohli had first floated the idea of him joining the franchise during the India's limited overs leg of Australia last year. "We chatted after the ODI and T20I series in Australia. He talked to me about potentially playing for RCB. If I got the opportunity, he said 'we would love to have you,'" Maxwell said in a video tweeted by RCB. "He floated the idea back even then. There was a long process in work. Thankfully, I am playing for RCB now," he added.

PANT WILL DO A GOOD JOB: LARA

Brian Lara believes Rishabh Pant has improved a lot in the last few months and will do a good job in leading Delhi Capitals. "I think he has got a team that will support him which is most important. He has grown in the last 4 months and I think he will do a good job."

POINTS TABLE

	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
1 DC	1	1	0	+0.779	2
2 MI	2	1	1	+0.225	2
3 PBKS	1	1	0	+0.200	2
4 RCB	1	1	0	+0.050	2
5 KKR	2	1	1	+0.000	2
6 RR	1	0	1	-0.200	0
7 SRH	1	0	1	-0.500	0
8 CSK	1	0	1	-0.779	0

Injured Royals look to bounce back

KEY PLAYERS

PRITHVI SHAW
Shaw is in good form recently and his aggressive batting in the powerplay overs set the tone

JOS BUTTLER
In Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes' absence, Jos is now the most experienced player in the team

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Coming off a heart-breaking loss in the first match and hit by star all-rounder Ben Stokes' injury-forced ouster, a beleaguered Rajasthan Royals would hope for another inspirational knock from new skipper Sanju Samson when it faces a confident Delhi Capitals in an IPL match at Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

While DC made a superb start under new captain Rishabh Pant, clinching a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings in their opening contest, RR suffered a four-run defeat against Punjab Kings in a high-scoring match on Monday night.

As if the loss was not enough, RR were dealt a severe blow on Tuesday when Stokes was ruled out of the remainder of the tournament with a broken finger. He sustained that injury during the agonising defeat.

In his absence, the pressure would be on the likes of Jos Buttler, Shivam Dube and Riyan Parag to deliver the goods and provide ample support to their young skipper, who has been sensational in the first match.

The likes of Manan Vohra (12), Buttler (25) Dube (23), Parag (25) all got starts but failed to lead the much-needed support to Samson.

The major worry for RR team management would be the performance of its bowling unit. RR bowling unit looked rusty and completely out of sorts in their opener.

Barring young Chetan Sakariya (3/31), who had a fantastic debut, all other RR bowlers went for runs and looked completely clueless against opposition batsmen.

Mustafizur Rahman, Chris Morris, Stokes, Shreyas Gopal, Rahul Tewatia — all went for big runs and need to pull up their socks quickly.

VENUE: WANKHEDE STADIUM, MUMBAI

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	22
Rajasthan Royals	11
Delhi Capitals	11

LAST YEAR'S MATCHES

- Delhi Capitals beat Rajasthan Royals by 46 runs in Sharjah
- Delhi Capitals defeated Rajasthan Royals by 13 runs in Dubai

95

Sanju Samson who smashed 95 sixes in 76 innings of 80 matches, needs just five sixes to become the second Rajasthan Royals batsman after Shane Watson (109 sixes in 78 matches) to complete a century of sixes in Indian Premier League

68

Rishabh Pant led Delhi Capitals to a seven-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on captaincy debut in IPL. He led Delhi Capitals for the first time after playing 68 matches

Faisal Features

Last edition's runner-up side DC, on the other hand, had a perfect start to their campaign as they defeated three-time champions CSK with consummate ease.

Opting to field, DC had allowed CSK to pile up a competitive 188 for 7 but Shikhar Dhawan and Prithvi Shaw made a short walk of the target with a 138-run opening partnership, that laid the foundation for the win.

On the bowling front, Chris Woakes (2/18) and Avesh Khan (2/23) had a good outing in the first game and would look to carry on their form but the likes of Ravichandran Ashwin, Tom Curran, Amit Mishra and Stoinis had a forgettable outing and would be desperate to make amends on Thursday.

The contest will also witness test of wits of two new captains in Pant and Samson.

Pant's way of thinking has shades of Kohli & Williamson: Ponting

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting feels Rishabh Pant's thought process as captain is quite similar to Virat Kohli and Kane Williamson, as the former Australian captain describes the spirited Indian wicketkeeper-batsman as a "winner".

Pant won his debut match as captain in the IPL against Chennai Super Kings and Ponting believes that his energy is simply hard to miss.

"Someone like him (Pant), you want him to get involved in the game as early as possible, and bat for as long as possible," Ponting told *cricket.Com.au*.

"The way he thinks, he is actually a bit like Virat or Kane. Now, if they are in at the end, you are going to win more often than not no matter how many runs are required," the legendary Australian said.

"He is energetic and you can hear that from behind the stumps, he loves being in the contest and



Rishabh Pant ©DelhiCapitals

he is a winner," the DC coach was all praise for his captain.

Ponting understands that there will be questions about Pant's glove-work but asserts that he has shown remarkable improvement during the England series.

"...He's just brilliant. The com-

parisons are always going to be there for someone who bats like that," he responded to Pant's being compared with his former teammate Adam Gilchrist.

"Gilly's keeping is better than Rishabh's no doubt about that. The way I saw him keep on turning pitches in India (vs England), I thought he kept way better than I thought he could," said Ponting, known for his bluntness.

"If his keeping improves, with his batting, he could be India's keeper in Tests for next 10-12 years no doubt."

The coach had no hesitation in revealing that the last edition of the IPL wasn't Pant's finest.

"He was disappointing for us in the tournament last year. He had gone (to the UAE) with a lot of overweight."

"He turned up a bit underdone, did his hammy (hamstring) in the third or fourth game and missed a couple of games. And when he came back, he couldn't get back to the level we expected him to be," Ponting recollected.

Babar dethrones Kohli from top

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam on Wednesday ended Indian captain Virat Kohli's long reign at the top of the ICC rankings for batsmen to become only the fourth from his country to attain the pole position.

The 26-year-old right-hand batsman's 82-ball 94 in the third game ODI series against South Africa helped him gain 13 rating points to reach 865 points.

He now leads the Indian captain by eight points, the ICC said in a statement.

Babar had started the series at 837 rating points but moved up to 858 (ahead of Kohli) after his score of 103 in the first match.

He dropped to 852 by the time of the last weekly rankings update with a score of 32 in the second ODI.

In Tests, Babar has attained a best of fifth position and is currently ranked sixth while in T20Is he is third but has been number one in the past.

PSG knock holders Bayern Out

Parisians lose 1-0 but reach semis on away goals

AFP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain knocked holders Bayern Munich out of the Champions League on Tuesday despite Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scoring against his old club as a 1-0 defeat in the second leg at the Parc des Princes could not prevent the French giants from winning a tremendous quarter-final tie on away goals.

Neymar twice hit the woodwork for PSG in the first half and Choupo-Moting then put Bayern in front five minutes before the break.

But the reigning European champions could not get the second goal they needed after losing 3-2 at home in the first leg last week.



Neymar celebrates with Leandro Paredes after PSG win ©neymarjr

Chelsea reach first semis in seven years

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Chelsea reached the Champions League semi-finals for the first time since 2014 despite a 1-0 defeat against Porto in Tuesday's quarter-final second leg in

Seville. Thomas Tuchel's side will play Real Madrid or Liverpool for a place in the final after producing a masterclass in game management to win 2-1 on aggregate. Chelsea smothered Porto with an intelligent defensive approach

until Mehdi Taremi's stunning bicycle kick in the last minute of stoppage-time. But that sublime strike was out of character with the rest of Porto's display as they laboured to overturn the 2-0 first-leg deficit.

Mauricio Pochettino's team, who had already eliminated Barcelona in the last 16, can now look forward to a semi-final against Manchester City or Borussia Dortmund.

"I am delighted, despite the defeat. We were facing a great team, the European champions, but we are going back to the semi-finals," Neymar told broadcaster RMC Sport.